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A note from the editor-in-chief



By Zipporah Abarca
Editor-in-chief

Over the past year, the Society of Professional Journalists, *Central Michigan Life* and the Journalism 445 capstone class has been working diligently to take the temperature of Central Michigan University's efforts towards diversity, equity and inclusion on campus.

In this print edition, you will find that we have gathered extensive knowledge and data on how staff vacancies and budget cuts within the Division of Student Affairs have impacted the ability to execute the recent Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and

Belonging strategic plan that CMU has implemented until 2028.

We have provided our readers with information on the strategic plan; climate survey responses from students and employees about how safe and appreciated they feel on campus; how the operating budget for Institutional Diversity has fluctuated; and features on student, staff and faculty experiences.

With recent racial discriminatory issues that took place on campus, this impacted our investigation immensely. It pointed us to CMU's nondiscriminatory protocol policy, to ask the tough questions to students, staff, faculty and administrators to address personal impacts, as well as how to hold the future of this institution accountable to change — including the work that is already being done.

Much of what we have reported on overflowed the 40 pages of this print

edition. Therefore, I highly encourage you, our readers, to look at CM Life's website for our investigative stories that went into this project, as well as the podcast and videos we put together to provide an even more intimate version of the storytelling we sought to do.

Although I am stepping down as editor-in-chief and will be among the graduates who will be walking on May 4, I want to let CMU know that I still have another year on campus. This work is far from over, and I look forward to keeping an eye on each other.

Zipporah Abarca is Central Michigan Life's 2023-24 editor-in-chief and president of the Society of Professional Journalists. She will graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in journalism and in 2025 with a master's in leadership.

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INDEX

OPINION



8

This is your home; you deserve to be comfortable
CMU President Bob Davies and Board of Trustees Chair Todd Regis have a message of support and safety for students, faculty and staff.

FEATURE



12

Life, limitless
For CMU student Tarry Palmer, the incident that reduced his vision just strengthened his resolve.

SPECIAL



13

Oh baby!
Celebrate the class of 2024 with these special graduation wishes from family and friends.

SPORTS



37

Bringing home the hardware
Meet the seniors whose grit, determination and choreography led the Central Michigan Dance Team through COVID and to back-to-back national titles.

ONLINE



More on this project
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Diversity, Equity and Indifference?

Staff vacancies within Division of Student Affairs and OIDEI slow DEI efforts at CMU

**By Zipporah Abarca,
Kaia Zimmerman and
Masha Smahliuk**

*Editor-in-chief, sports editor and
news editor*

“What does it mean to be a student affairs professional, when people are quitting left and right?” Shawna Patterson-Stephens, the vice president for Inclusive Excellence and Belonging, asked. “But then you have people that are really passionate about the work. ... What does it mean to be a person that survives?”

“That is a national conversation that’s being had,” Patterson-Stephens continued. “And when you take Central Michigan into account being a rural place, the impact that then has (is) we are hyper-dependent upon the student services we provide, because we’re not in a city.”

Over the course of six months, the Central Michigan University chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, *Central Michigan Life* and a journalism capstone class have taken a deep dive into diversity, equity and inclusion efforts on campus. From funding to impact, the investigation has involved hundreds of hours of research and interviews, multiple requests under the auspices of the Freedom of Information Act and reams of documentation.

The findings? CMU is not alone, but a microcosm of a national challenge facing higher education.

The Division of Student Affairs at CMU has had over 10 staff members leave in the last year, including its vice president and at least one director on leave for the remainder of the spring semester.

Among those that have left, some positions have been vacant for much of the academic year, including the Director of LGBTQ Services, Director of Indigenous Affairs (currently has interim

director) and the Director of the Sexual Aggression Services (currently has interim director).

Patterson-Stephen said she has noticed a lot of burnout among staff, as well as in higher education as a system.

“It’s a current point of conversation that is being had at the national level in thinking about how we are supporting the needs of Student Affairs staff post-COVID ... They (Student Affairs) were worked in ways that really stretched people, stretched our understanding of what it means to provide holistic support when everyone is in crisis at the same time.”

She said there are residual effects from COVID-19 related to staff and faculty burnout; however, these “emergent issues” have been here all along.

Aside from being understaffed, Student Affairs has also been assigned to lead 42% of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and Belonging strategic plan tasks, and 77% of the goals in total.

Matt Johnson is a higher education professor and program director for the master’s in higher education and administration program. He is married to Erica Johnson, the interim assistant vice president of Student Affairs. This did not impact *Central Michigan Life’s* reporting in any way.

Johnson said each of the staff members at Student Affairs has done way more than could be reasonably expected.

“They continue to turn out ... events for cultural months and celebrations, every year, no matter the budget cuts, no matter the enrollment; we have robust, diverse, consistent programming for these cultural affirmation celebrations, and they continue to do it with less and less money and fewer and fewer staff,” Johnson said.

“And that’s only a part of what they do is programming,” he continued.

His department went from 17 faculty members eight years ago to seven just recently.

“That’s the case all over the place,” he said. “And the DEI offices and those student-facing offices around DEI-related things are not immune to that. Whether they’ve had a disproportionate impact, I don’t know. But they (DEI-related offices) in my estimation have always been underfunded.”

When asked if she ever got the impression that any of the staff who left Student Affairs within the last two years were planning on doing so, Patterson-Stephens said no.

“But, I mean, prior to two years ago, I was new,” she said. “And I don’t think anybody would have shared that information with me.”

Kasey Perez, the interim director of Indigenous Affairs, and Amy Folan, the associate vice president and director of Athletics, both said they did not get the impression Colleen Green, the previous director of Indigenous Affairs, was planning on leaving the university.

Perez said she viewed Green as a mentor, and added that sometimes people just find better opportunities and have to take them.

Folan said she and Green had grown close with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe’s and Office of Indigenous Affairs partnership with Athletics. Although she was sad and surprised to hear of Green’s departure, she said that is just life, people get new opportunities. Both Perez and Folan were happy for Green.

Patterson-Stephens said the university has a lot of “soul searching” to do for people at CMU that focus on co-curriculars for students.

When people leave the university, they are often not replaced, Johnson said. He continued and said he does not feel very supported by the university, but

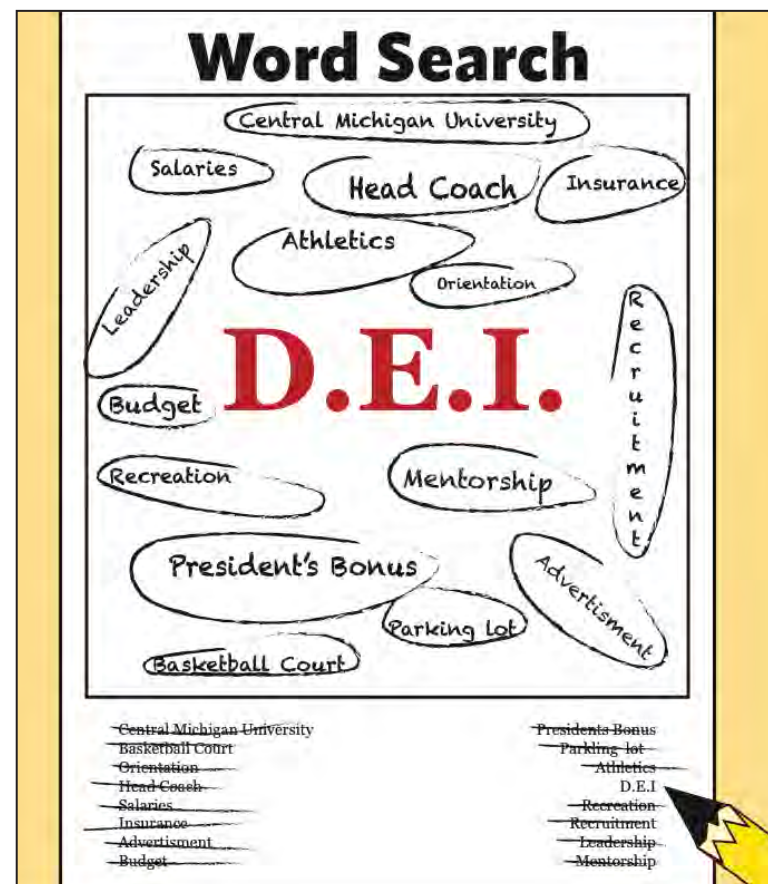


Illustration by Andrew Bootz | Presentation editor

recognized the university is not all to blame for the turnovers.

“We’re all connected,” he said. “Eight years ago, we were an institution of 27,000 or 28,000 (students). Now, we’re 14,000. We halved this university in under a decade.”

“That is a monumental decline to lose half of your population within a decade. ... That has tremendous pain points associated with it that we’re going to be dealing with for the next two decades.”

Filling vacancies

Lori Hella, associate vice president of Human Resources, said CMU has a lot of vacancies, but that is the nature of the employment market.

“CMU is not unique when it comes to the number of vacant

positions that we have,” Hella said. “It goes back to the labor market. The number of individuals (that) are available to fill positions with the skills that we’re looking for, and those that are willing to accept the salaries that are being offered to them.”

Hella said HR does not collect the information why an employee decides to leave CMU; however, it is something they can share with their supervisor.

Mary Hill is the vice president of finance and administrative services as well, as the chief financial officer. She currently serves on the Position Justification Committee, alongside Provost Nancy Mathews and President Bob Davies.

Hill said the committee receives hiring justification forms from senior leadership across

campus, who are responsible for their budgets and the hiring of their staff. The justification form is meant for those senior leaders to fill out when they would like to have a vacant position filled within their department, division, college and so on.

“So, we kind of want senior leaders across campus to take a little pause and say, ‘OK, is this the correct fit ... for the way the university is now?’” she said. “Not only for their own department, but for their division more across campus.”

The committee meets almost every other week; there are position vacancies all the time, Hill said.

When they meet, Hill said they go through all submissions they have received and make a decision within the session.

When asked about how the vacant positions are prioritized to be filled, Hill said the vice president of each division is responsible for “prioritization,” not the committee.

Hill explained that if staff within the division wanted a vacant position filled, they would have to first approach the vice president and ask to submit a justification form. The position would remain vacant or be filled depending on the administrator’s decision.

There have been rare instances where the committee has said no to filling a position, Hill said. Instead, the committee has said to hold off, based on whether the timing is right.

Renee Watson, then the vice president of the Division of Student Affairs, submitted 10 justification forms the last week of February, Hill wrote in an email.

The positions are as follows:

- Residence Hall Director Saxe Hall
- Director Indigenous Affairs
- Assistant Director Residence Life
- Residence Hall Director Sweeney Hall
- Administrative Secretary Student Disability Services
- Assistant Director LGBTQ Services
- Assistant Director UREC

- Executive Secretary/PT Leadership Institute
- Assistant Director Leadership Institute
- Assistant Director Mentoring

All of the listed positions, aside from the two residence hall director positions, were approved to move forward with being posted on March 6, Hill said in an email.

“They (the residence hall director positions) didn’t even come to the committee because we’re working through the budget process for residence life,” Hill said. “And that’s kind of a separate animal than the general fund position.”

“But it wasn’t to say ‘No, you can’t fill them.’ We were just saying, ‘OK let’s get this budget stuff done. And then we’ll get those through.’”

When the director of LGBTQ+ Services position was posted in March, it was changed to an assistant director role.

“I don’t know, other than if a change like that was made,” Hill said, “that would have been the decision of the division.”

The director of LGBTQ Services position had been vacant for five and a half months before it was posted.

“I think a lot of people have looked at that and wondered ‘why?’” Johnson said. “It was a question in Academic Senate recently around, like, ‘Why has this been also vacant for five months but then demoted to an assistant director role?’”

“I don’t know the reasons why,” Johnson continued. “I think it’s hard to see it as anything less than a deprioritization. I mean, that’s the language I continued to use. You know, I don’t think anybody over there would use the language of moving from a director to an assistant director as a de-prioritization, but I absolutely think it is.”

Watson’s departure was announced April 8 in an email from the university. In the same email, Stan Shingles, who had just retired, was announced as interim vice president.

Shingles restored the director of LGBTQ Services position

DEI work is hard ... and therefore the people who are doing that work need community and support

Morgan Barbret CMU alumna

shortly after his return. He said the position is now posted and the search committee is working on finding the candidates to fill it.

“The gaps lie in the fact that we didn’t have the experts there; look at our LGBTQ program,” Shingles said.

On the other hand, even without experts, students have had opportunities to do the services and jobs to fill in the needs of the programming, which has helped them grow and build community, Shingles said.

Similarly, Shingles said he plans to fill in the positions of the director of Indigenous Affairs and the assistant director of Multicultural Academic Student Services Office, which have been both already posted.

“It’s my goal before school starts in August that that area will be fully staffed and will be able to respond in a timely manner, but more importantly, serve students in the way that not only we want to serve them, but they deserve to be served,” Shingles said.

When contacted, Watson declined to comment.

Director of LGBTQ Services

After 15 years with the university, Director of LGBTQ Services and one of the Co-Directors of the Institute of Transformative Dialogue (ITD) Shannon Jolliff-Dettore left the university at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year.

Jolliff-Dettore was a major asset to the university and helped many students by mentoring

them on having hard conversations and showing empathy, according to alumnus Morgan Barbret and graduate student Emmy Montgomery.

“(Shannon) embodies humility and curiosity and advocacy and has shown me so much of what it looks like to stand up for injustices and compassion,” Montgomery said. “And I think it’s CMU’s biggest loss that they did not see what they had when they had her.”

Barbret said that she thinks Jolliff-Dettore was ignored when she went to the Student Affairs and university leadership about concerns with DEI efforts, including the ITD being defunded.

“She’s an expert, she’s a consultant,” Barbret said. “She was being treated like her services and her ability to contribute to the university was less valuable than it was.”

Jolliff-Dettore confirmed Barbret’s comments but declined further comment.

Barbret questioned the leadership who ignored Jolliff-Dettore’s concerns.

“As far as I understand, that means they’re not doing their job,” Barbret said. “Their job is to serve campus and serve the people who are a part of it, so if we’re not listening, then I feel that’s ... an error on their job description.”

Shingles said he was not a part of the university’s conversation about ITD being defunded. He didn’t have the information on which direction the university would take the program in the future.

Montgomery said that losing

someone like Jolliff-Dettore has an impact on the university’s ability to meet students’ needs.

“I think that is one of the hugest oversights and losses of the university not listening to the impact of this defunding choice because it was so illustrative that the values and gifts and skills that Shannon uniquely brings to campus and provides for students was not prioritized,” Montgomery said. “Students needed that advocate; you need someone in that position.”

“It’s hard to find the words for how frustrating that is for students and how understandable it is for people who are just giving everything they can to fight for them and not feeling the institution alongside on that fight.”

When discussing why she thinks the position has not been filled yet, Barbret said that CMU has not done a good job of helping people in those DEI positions who are known to have a heavy workload.

“DEI work is hard,” Barbret said. “And therefore, the people who are doing that work need community and support. And I think that admin seem to believe that they could just put all of that work on, you know, just a couple people and not spread that work out.”

Going forward, Barbret and Montgomery hope the university can have the tough conversations and listen to the people who are a part of the CMU community when they come with concerns.

“Just ... have real conversations, where they’re actually listening to the people who are doing that work, because I feel like in general ... they’re not understanding the level of support that those roles require,” Barbret said. “They’re not understanding how overburdened they are and how much is being expected of them.”

The two said it was discouraging to not be listened to when students are the ones who will be most affected by the decision.

“It feels tragically ironic because the whole purpose of

EFFORTS |

CONTINUED FROM 5

understanding what dialogue is, is that it's to seek understanding of another person, which is what makes the dialogue different than discussion," Montgomery said. "Dialogue is just about trying to find understanding, and it was infuriating that we could not even open up dialogue to be understood, we were resisted from the get-go."

"It's just discouraging, because it seemed like student opinion did not faze their decision," Barbret said.

Montgomery hopes students who are continually battling this issue find a safe space where their concerns will be listened to, and they are not alone.

"I would want students to know that frustration with the institution is extremely legitimate," Montgomery said. "And while systemic change is painfully slow and hard to identify, there are individuals that are still fighting for them and ... they're not alone."

She also stressed the importance of students asking questions and being curious about what the university is doing.

"If people find this conversation of funding for DEI resources and all of that confusing, ask questions, be curious, learn more," Montgomery said. There's reasons this is valuable. And if they're hard to see, be curious please."

According to the university's operating budget for LGBTQ Services, for the last four years the unit received \$2,551 for all supplies and equipment, which is essential to the programming.

Johnson said when he had heard how much the office was receiving a few years ago, he thought to himself, "why (and) how is it so completely underfunded?"

"But I think if you were to look at an (organizational) structure eight years ago, versus now and look at budgets, I think there'd be quite an interesting story to tell because it's always been my perception and always been what

I've heard, and experienced that they (Office of LGBTQ+ Services) are underfunded," he said.

From 2020 to 2023, the office received an extra \$20,000 from the university, but was declined that one-time payment for 2023-24.

Shingles said his highest budget priority when he accepted the role as interim vice president was to restore the \$20,000 funding and he has already submitted the request for that.

However, he said that the office didn't have a deficit of resources this year, because the division had given a one-time payment of \$20,000.

Impact on OIDEI

Staff vacancies within student affairs has also impacted Patterson-Stephens' workload, she said. She said she is trying to make efforts beyond seeing how staff are doing and provide support in loosening some of the load.

"How can we share some of the flow and how can we be more strategic in our planning, so that some of this work is disseminated across campus and not just in student affairs?" she said.

"There's a lot to be done," Patterson-Stephens said. "And I think we're all feeling the strain as a result."

Nikita Murry, the director of Diversity Education, and Patterson-Stephens directly report to President Robert Davies.

In the operating budget for 2017-2018, OIDEI and Diversity Education was under the academic divisions budget. Joe Garrison, the executive director of financial planning and budgets, said it was taken out because they were among the few cost centers within that budget; therefore, they would not get their own account to be presented separately in the university's operating budget.

From there, institutional diversity and diversity education — the two cost centers within the original institutional diversi-

ty budget — was put under the president's division for more of an overarching university education with respect to diversity, as well as a broader lens, Garrison said.

In conversations with President Davies, he saw the importance of having an institutional view on diversity from high-level institutional support areas such as Diversity Education and OIDEI.

"I think that by not having it (OIDEI and Diversity Education) in the President's division, it would likely not be as elevated if it were in a separate division, such as in the past when it was in the academic division," Garrison said. "It may be more focused on college-related matters if it's in the academic division."

"If all diversity efforts were in another division like student affairs, it may be focused more on student initiatives, rather than looking at that broader umbrella."

Aside from Patterson-Stephens and Murry, there are only two other positions in OIDEI, and those include the executive office specialist and the assistant director of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The Director of Research, Evaluation and Communication position has been vacant since August 2021.

Patterson-Stephens said when the first search was run, an offer was made but not accepted; therefore it has been vacant since.

In terms of the impact that has had on her ability to do her job, Patterson-Stephens said she has had to look at what resources she had available and develop the best structure she could.

As for the director position, Patterson-Stephens said she knew the position involved her need for an analyst, a grant writer, someone to write on behalf of their office when incidents like the recent racial slurs arise and give feedback on campus messages, while keeping the office's social media outlets running.

"I already knew then I had to

These things (DEI) (were) happening in an institutional way, then it would be embedded and you would see all these things happening across campus.

Shawna Patterson-Stephens Vice President of Inclusive Excellence and Belonging

(take) communications (the director position) off and figure out a different way to attend to that need in our office," she said. "And I'm still languishing if I'm honest, like, it's not what I want ... most things are not what I want, but it's what I've got."

Right now, Patterson-Stephens said she will suffer the design of information as long as people know she does not have the capacity to care about the way it looks.

"My first point of need is needing people to know that these things are happening," she said. "It's (that process is) not what I want."

A lot of OIDEI's reporting has been slow, because the director's position would be the person to handle that, Patterson-Stephens said. Although she does not have the time to fulfill that role within her own leadership, Patterson-Stephens has been doing it.

While the position has been vacant for the last three years, Patterson-Stephens has taken the lead in developing and authoring the 2023-2028 strategic plan and also bringing committees and councils together to synthesize those ideas while keeping record.

Additionally, she has been tasked with gathering data for the climate survey reports, on top of her daily duties as vice president of OIDEI and chief diversity officer.

"The climate survey reports have been so slow ... I would prefer to turn out data much faster than I can," she said. "And I won't give up on it because information is half the battle when it comes to these needs."

Working alongside an "amazing team that's very patient" with her, Patterson-Stephens said she does the best she can while also trying to be mindful of the things the rest of her team is trying to get accomplished.

"I don't like people having to work under that kind of pressure, but they (OIDEI) do," Patterson-Stephens said. "But they know I care about them. They know I'm willing to do anything for them. So I guess that's the trade off. Yeah, our work is not as robust as I would like it to be."

Since the original search committee was put together for the director's position, Patterson-Stephens has not submitted a position justification form to get it filled.

When thinking about what needs to happen within the unit of Institutional Diversity, Patterson-Stephens said some of those needs are not funded, but for what is, the office works to sacrifice some pieces to ensure DEI programming can happen on campus.

"I mean, people are still looking to us for financial support," Patterson-Stephens said. "And I think it makes sense because we're Institutional Diversity. By and large at different institutions that's where you go if you can't find your funding anywhere else: You go to program board, you go to institutional diversity."

"So we have to make sure that at the best of our ability we're able to support but we are not able to support like we would like to."

As for being tasked with being the direct report for institutional-wide diversity efforts at CMU

(whereas Murry handles the academic side) Patterson-Stephens said different institutions have different models.

It is a lot of work for two people, Patterson-Stephens said, but they always have to build partnerships. She said some of the challenges are not necessarily that they do not have the right people or enough people, but that they are being strategic about the ways they are building partnerships.

"We are really looking at informing policy and procedure, looking at what's going on in Student Affairs, what's going on in curriculum development for faculty and staff, looking at hiring processes and procedures," she said.

Importantly, given that it is just Murry and Patterson-Stephens that handle the direct reports, she said they are not the only unit that is strapped in that way — it's a national problem.

"What we deal with at CMU is textbook to the tee," she said. "So the challenge we would always have even if we were fully staffed and I had the staffing structure of my dreams, it would still be a lot of work."

Patterson-Stephens said she has heard people blame certain units on campus for particular issues that are not being addressed.

"If you can actually pinpoint and say this one person is the institution, then that place is a house of cards," she said. "Because there's never one place within higher education that is legit just one person being the institution."

Impact on DEI efforts

When it comes to the impact of vacancies and funding for the success of DEI on campus, Patterson-Stephens said it is only part of it.

She said it comes down to making sure that staff and faculty are diverse enough that they can speak to different lived experiences, so there is not always a need for specific people from diversity units to talk about their experiences as a minoritized individual.

"I would like to see that more

readily embedded in the faculty units on this campus. ... But there are other entities on this campus that students don't think are touch points that could be better situated to support that effort too, it just takes some creativity," Patterson-Stephens said.

Overall, Patterson-Stephens said she would love to have more money, staff and faculty embedded within her unit to be able to achieve a broader vision she has for what the OIDEI unit and the institution could be.

"And I do think there's a lot of potential here to make that occur," she said. "If we play our cards right."

Function of DEI efforts and offices

Patterson-Stephens' interpretation of the Division of Student Affairs leading many of the strategic plan goals is that it signals the involvement of students.

"Hypothetically, they (Student Affairs) are great at getting a mass number of students engaged in ways that most other units struggle with," Patterson-Stephens said.

She noted that Student Affairs can get around 150 to 500 students engaging in their offices, whereas in a classroom setting, that engagement is more structured for 30 or 60 students at a time.

In her world, Patterson-Stephens said, there are two arguments to be made: what should be happening and what is.

"What should be happening is I don't have an office," she said. "My role doesn't exist. Because if these things were happening in an institutional way, then it would be embedded and you would see all these things happening across campus."

She said that the institution would then not need someone to serve as a reminder for diversity, such as diversity advocates on search committees.

Aaron Foote is an associate professor in the school of politics, justice, society and public service. He disagreed that DEI offices are a reminder for diversity.

"DEI exists to uphold white supremacy," he said. "It is a university apparatus of which most of the people in those offices are totally powerless, designed to curtail Black and Brown students."

"Why would a system of white supremacy build within itself something to take it down?" he continued. "It would never do that. And so, DEI isn't a reminder. It is something that we were given to distract us from the very nature in root of these institutions."

Foote said there needs to be an organizational restructure to get rid of white supremacy so there is no need for DEI offices.

"If they (administration) were interested in real transformation, they would be interested in empowering those (DEI) offices to enact real change at universities all over the country," Foote said. "This is not (just) a Central thing."

Patterson-Stephens asked if her office or position didn't exist, what do people think would happen right now?

She said institutions were developed and designed for a specific reason, including the additions of diversity offices.

"And so, we're a public institution, who can't be embedding belief systems into a public institution, but we can make sure that different kinds of belief systems or ideologies are made accessible in a public space. And that's why we'll have a diversity office," Patterson-Stephens said. "It's exhausting."

Some people view diversity as a programmatic idea such as the heritage month programming. Instead, Patterson-Stephens said those kinds of events are so people feel represented in different aspects of college life.

"So because (diversity is) perceived as or treated as an add on, that's why you'll then see it at a national level (as) under-resourced, understaffed," Patterson-Stephens said. "People don't know what to do with it, how to engage with it."

Looking to the future

Shingles will lead the Division of Student Affairs until December

2024.

"I'm excited anytime I can engage with students, anytime I can serve the university, and more importantly, sometimes in life what needs to be done is bigger than us," Shingles said. "So for me, to be back at CMU, to be a part of supporting students success ... it's something I've always had a passion for."

"I come back with a keen understanding of the priorities and the needs of our students."

Those priorities include student success, engagement and creation of positive experiences at CMU that help students grow, he said.

Additionally, Shingles' goal is to ensure that every staff member in Student Affairs feels heard, appreciated and valued, he said.

"We're going to move forward with strategy, setting priorities and assuring that not only are there good outcomes for students, but good outcomes for our Division of Student Affairs team," Shingles said. "As a leader, I have always been inclusive. I have always been one who listens to the team. And so, it's never gonna be, 'because I said so.'"

Shingles said he also hoped for increasing resources for programming to be able to serve student needs.

"One of the things that we're challenged with is we don't have as many resources as we previously had," Shingles said. "There's no secret that we've had some challenges with enrollment, but I'm excited about the direction that we're headed. ... Enrollment increases mean revenue increases, which gives us greater capacity to fund the programs and the experiences that our students not only get, but that they richly deserve."

This academic year the Division of Student Affairs is operating off a new budget model, which was a university-wide decision, Shingles said. He said Student Affairs is not the one who makes budget changes, but they are able to allocate for resources needed for the division.

"The division will have a total budget that has been approved typically each year," Garrison said. "And from there, they (division



Stan Shingles

leaders) can then prioritize what they feel is most important within their division."

Shingles said his plan is to set priorities and to deploy resources that the division has. Student Affairs will also partner with other offices on their programming for resources, finance and workers.

"Our financial challenges have been no secret," Shingles said. "We don't have more money than we can use. So it's going to have to be setting the appropriate priorities. And I know that the campus community has been supportive of that."

Johnson said there is a sense of nervousness on campus with the budget cuts and turnover rate; however, the people who have remained, he would describe as resilient.

"We can be frustrated and angry and wanting and demanding more, while also loving this place, and loving what this place can be," he said. "What this place is, loving students, loving our job, continuing to show up, continuing to do this work, continuing to invest, it's an odd juxtaposition of ... those things."

The reason why many staff and faculty stay, Johnson said is because of the difference they get to make in students' lives and widening access to opportunities to help their careers and with democracy.

"And so, I still love coming to work ... I love when people are engaged and you just hope that nobody mistakes the frustration in the speaking out ... for not caring because if people didn't care, they would just leave or just go about their business," he said.

This is your home; you deserve to feel welcome



By Robert O. Davies and Todd Regis
Central Michigan University President
and Chair of the Board of Trustees

Everyone deserves to feel welcomed, supported and empowered to thrive at Central Michigan University. We are more than a place to earn a degree, we are the academic and professional **home** of thousands of students, faculty and staff members. When the egregious behavior of a few individuals threatens the safety and well-being of our community, we will take action to address it.

During the week of April 15, we took swift action to address and condemn recent incidents involving the use of a racist slur. However, we know there are larger issues we must address by reviewing, updating and creating university-wide policies and procedures. This work is underway, and we

are committed to ensuring its completion. We all have important roles to play in this effort.

Though we dream of a world in which racism and other hate speech no longer exist, we are reminded that it has not been eradicated — not on our campus, in our country or in our world. As is the case on every college campus and in every community, there are people who do not choose to embrace the ideals of inclusion and respect. And although we cannot fully eradicate racism everywhere, we have taken and will continue to take steps to address it here.

Our CMU community will create **an environment that is hostile to racism, hatred and intolerance**. We will promote training and learning opportunities that reduce ignorance, whether intentional or accidental. We will facilitate engaged conversations that promote understanding and compassion — which are included in the new CMU Strategic Plan, the Strategic Plan for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging, and Academic Visioning. We will ensure that our policies and processes demonstrate that all forms of **racism are unwelcome in our community**.

Each member of our community must accept the responsibility to learn, to participate and to enforce these efforts. The Board

of Trustees and university leadership team are committed to creating these solutions in alignment with the CMU Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging Plan and the recommendations received from our students, faculty and staff.

To be transparent, we will communicate our progress on these efforts as we go, knowing that some of these solutions will manifest more quickly than others. The work will continue until our goals are achieved, and we know those goals may change as we move forward.

Together, we can create a university culture that promotes inclusion, fosters understanding and champions respect for all people. Our goal is to empower every individual to find their place within our community and to feel a sense of belonging on our campus.

This does not mean that racist comments and other forms of hate speech will never happen again. It does mean that we are shaping an environment where those comments will decrease in number. It means we will mitigate the risk of harmful language and behaviors as we increase understanding and compassion.

This also does not mean that no one will ever again be offended by the things said and done on our campus. Not all offensive speech is unconstitutional, and there **will**

be times when we must protect an individual's right to free expression.

As a taxpayer-funded public institution of higher education and as a marketplace of ideas committed to the academic freedom of our faculty and students, there will be times that challenging, uncomfortable and even offensive language will be a part of the educational experience.

It will take time for our community to find the balance between the need to protect freedom of expression and the need to create an environment that empowers and supports all learners, but we will seek it together. It will take time for us to resolve the underlying issues that lead to hate speech and behavior, but we will find those solutions.

When we are successful in these efforts, Central Michigan University will serve as a model for institutions of higher education everywhere. It must, and will, be a community where everyone feels welcomed, supported and empowered to thrive.

This is our campus, this is our community, and this is our home. This is **our** CMU.

Robert O. Davies is the 15th president of Central Michigan University; Todd Regis is chair of the Central Michigan University Board of Trustees.

How will you transform your purpose?

The COVID class of 2024 will take with them hard-earned institutional knowledge ... and experience to heal deeper scars

EDITORIAL

Every soul that enters and leaves Central Michigan University gains and takes away institutional knowledge, and when they are gone for good, that knowledge leaves the general population. Some recognize this, others do not realize this is the case.

We do have administrators, staff, faculty and students that work relentlessly behind the scenes to preserve this institutional knowledge and look for ways to continue to foster it in an environment that is ever-changing. We also have those that do not care to acknowledge these efforts.

In the end, there are scars and also triumphs that need not be forgotten. Instead, they should live on in each and every one of us — regardless of how new to the campus some of us may be.

Diversity has been a hot topic since 2020, when George Floyd was killed during an act of police brutality. This stirred the hearts of

many with grief, disgust, anger and disdain toward the police. That act was not the first.

According to data collected by The Washington Post, during 2021 in the United States, there were at least 1,055 reported people killed by police. The Post began keeping track in 2015, and 2021 marked the most deaths.

Black people account for 13% of the U.S. population; and according to that same 2021 Post report, 27% of those killed by police were Black. The data concluded that Black people are twice as likely as white people to be killed by police officers.

As for 2023, The Guardian reported that there were 1,232 Americans who died because of police — 23.5% were Black people. The Guardian reported that 2023 was the

deadliest year for homicides committed by law enforcement in more than a decade.

Racism is a wound that has been around for centuries — today, it is less widely accepted and tolerated than it was many years ago. But social media has been a platform that allows racists to spread their disease and impact the lives and traumas of minoritized communities.

We have seen this on our campus and in universities, high schools, middle schools, workplaces, protests, restaurants — anywhere, you name it, racism is there. Now, how do we make sure CMU is an Anti-Racist community?

First things first: The campaign that has been very quiet since CMU announced it in 2020. Being an Anti-Racist campus

needs to be respired and stabilized so that it does more than just say “We Do” try to be Anti-Racist.

Throughout the investigation that was conducted by the Society of Professional Journalists and *Central Michigan Life*, we worked diligently to hold the university accountable to ensure that change can and will be made. CMU has many accomplishments when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion — especially in comparison to institutions across the nation that have completely defunded their DEI programs and offices.

According to the New York Times, in 2023, 84 bills were introduced that targeted diversity programs; 12 of them have become law, and 13 were awaiting signatures from governors as of April 21, 2024.

Some of those laws include the elimination of D.E.I. programs and offices at public universities and colleges, while others pro-

hibit diversity training and identity-based preferences for hiring and admissions, or the use of state funds for D.E.I. initiatives.

The states that have currently passed the law include Florida, Texas, North Carolina, North Dakota, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Alabama. Florida was among the first to enact the restrictions, including how educators discuss discrimination in mandatory courses, weakening tenure protections as a result, NYT reported.

In Alabama, the law also limits the teaching of “divisive concepts,” which is in regards to assigning “fault, blame or bias” to any race, religion, gender or nationality, the NYT reported.

We are in a transformational period that requires that student voices — human voices — to be heard. We have grown too used to being reactive instead of proactive to enact the systematic, sustainable change to discourage these kinds of laws from being considered, let alone passed.

At CMU, we have made change, and some of our leaders have stood tall with us. When many of us walk the stage on May 3 and 4, we will have not only juggled academia, social lives, mentorship, personal obstacles, job searches and discrimination that has targeted our peers or us directly, we have also battled the everlasting impacts of COVID-19.

The undergraduate class of 2024 was the

high school seniors of 2020 who had their last year ripped away from them — unable to have a prom, say final goodbyes to their favorite teachers or have a graduation that recognized their resilience.

Those 2024 undergraduates who are getting ready to walk the stage will do so with a surge of pride and fulfillment in their chest that may not be the same for those who walked before or will walk after.

Still, many of our graduates may not feel the same sense of pride they would have before the recent racial discrimination issue that happened on campus. We at CM Life respect that and recognize it, and we are not asking that you accept or forgive, but instead we would like to urge students to relish your moment.

Be proud of yourself and the individual actions you have taken to get to where you are now. Do not let another’s actions or words hold you back from the massive aplishment you have been working toward for years. You have passed through so many trials and tribulations that go against the typical college experience.

Take these experiences with you — good and bad — and use them to build yourself into the person you want to be. Then, impact others so that these different experiences can be recognized and shared.

You have immense power for change —



Central Michigan Life photo | Marie Underwood | File
Bachelor student graduates cheer as President Bob Davies declares them graduates during the fall commencement ceremony December 16, in McGuirk Arena.

even if you feel a heavy weight in your chest that you do not wish to bear. Every experience in our lives happens for a reason, as unfortunate as many of them are. So, what will you make of that, and how will you transform it into your purpose?

To those who graduate: Keep your chin

held high, be so very proud of yourself and know that wherever you go, you belong. And that as you and your institutional knowledge leave campus, CM Life is working diligently to make sure those wounds are healed properly and all that remains is a scar reminding us how far we will have come.

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Boundary-breaking love

United Methodist Conference votes to approve social justice principles, include LGBTQ community

By Lauren Rice
News editor

With a landslide vote, the United Methodist Conference (or organization) approved a slate of social justice principles at their first general conference in eight years. One of those principles was long contested: inclusion of the LGBTQ community.

For the last five years, individual churches have had to face the decision of whether to stay in the UMC and become inclusive of the LGBTQ community or vote to become a separate entity.

For Wesley at Central Michigan University, a United Methodist Church on CMU's campus, the choice to remain part of the UMC was easy. The pastor, Audra Hudson-Stone, said inclusion of the LGBTQ community is part of the church's identity.

"A lot of our identity has been focused on really engaging young adults in faith, but also justice," she said.

On the fifth day of the 2024 general conference, running April 23 through May 3, 92% affirmed support "for the equal rights, liberties, and protections of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity," according to United Methodist News.

What is the UMC?

The broader UMC is a global organization and denomination of Christianity.

"A United Methodist is someone who joins that mission by putting faith and love into action," according to the UMC website. "We believe that God loves all people, and we share in expressing that love."

Hudson-Stone said that love

can be defined differently from church to church, and that may be why not every UMC is inclusive.

"For some, love means that you put up boundaries," she said. "(Wesley) defines love ... as something that's boundary-breaking and invites us to prioritize marginalized communities to see them as full members of our community."

She explained that when love means putting up boundaries, it sets narrow expectations for people to be.

But how does that happen if everyone is reading the same Bible?

"There's a lot we know, and there's not one way to read the Bible," she said, describing it as "a collection of many different genres of stories from ancient people that need to be read with context."

According to an article from the History website, the actual authors of the Bible and when they were writing it are still somewhat debated. Because the whole book is a collection of smaller books from what is probably a long list of authors, the article said, pieces were written even hundreds of years after the proposed time when Jesus Christ lived.

Hudson-Stone said different types of Christianity will interpret the Bible differently, based on experience and various ways of holding "diversity of thought."

The structure of the UMC resembles the U.S. Government because they formed around the same time. The UMC has executive, legislative and judicial branches guided by a constitution (the Book of Discipline) just like the U.S., according to the Garden Church.

It also operates on a few different levels, like federalism, according to the Garden Church:

- The General Conference with global delegates
- The Jurisdictional conference, with representatives from the five jurisdictions in the U.S.
- The Annual Conference, with 54 zones in the U.S. making 54 different annual conferences
- The Districts, or groups of local churches within annual conferences
- Local churches

Why vote now?

The original Book of Discipline (BOD) was written in 1784, but the section that would exclude members of the LGBTQ community was written in the 1970s, according to UM News.

"We were supposed to make a decision around LGBTQ inclusion a few years ago, but COVID happened, and it got delayed," Hudson-Stone said. "The church moves really slowly in how it addresses these types of issues. The cultural conversation has progressed so quickly for the last 20 years that it's become unavoidable."

At the last point when a decision was on the table, in 2016, over 100 active ministers came out as gay in the U.S. and Philippines, according to UM News.

Hudson-Stone pointed out that the younger generations are more aware of the social positions of the organizations they interact with, which can influence whether they attend a church. So, if they're aware that the BOD is not inclusive, it could push young people away from the UMC.

But Hudson-Stone said there's a difference between



Nico Mendoza | Visuals editor

Sophia Scarnecchia poses for a photo, Friday, March 15th, at Wesley Church.

what's in the BOD and what happens in reality. She said a lot of churches are inclusive, it just hadn't been formally adopted by the larger organization.

"The church is recognizing that some of its issues on membership decline are due to its stances on these issues," she said.

In a video introduction to the current conference, UM Reporter Heather Hahn explained that at the last conference in 2016, there was legislation on the table to amend the BOD to include an acceptance statement for diverse "human sexualities."

Rather than adopt an overarching acceptance statement, the conference approved the plan to delegate the decision to lower-level jurisdictions and individual churches, Hahn said in the video. At this stage, local United Methodist churches can vote to stay in the inclusive General Conference or separate from the UMC.

Their deadline to vote on the original initiative has passed, and over 7,600 UM Churches in the U.S. voted to leave between 2019 and 2023. According to

UM News, the total number of active churches in the U.S. in 2022 was almost 30,000.

What's happening at CMU?

Sophia Scarnecchia is a CMU student, member of Wesley at CMU and president of Spectrum: a student organization dedicated to the LGBTQ community.

She said Spectrum hasn't had the same turnout it did when she was a freshman just a few years ago.

"This has never happened before, Spectrum has really been struggling with attendance, and a good analysis that someone brought to me is maybe people are afraid to go," Scarnecchia said.

She also noticed an increase in homophobic incidents at CMU, including negative responses to event postings on social media.

"People are more afraid to be themselves than (they were) freshman year," Scarnecchia said. She added that the Registered Student Organization (RSO) Transcend, which is

I definitely did feel a little bit of fear towards coming back into a church, not just because of my history with it, but my fear of admitting to people that I believe in God

Sophia Scarnecchia

CMU student, Spetrum president and member of Wesley at CMU

dedicated to the transgender community, doesn't have an email list or publicly share the locations of their meetings.

"They keep them private because of how much hate happens on campus," she said.

Scarnecchia added that the increase in incidents since the pandemic may have been because the university isn't taking action against violations of its

core values.

"They are very much being gone against, and nothing is really being done about it," she said.

Before she was a member of Wesley, Scarnecchia said she and her family went to a Catholic church in Ann Arbor. While the Ann Arbor area was generally accepting of her queer identity, the Catholic church

was not.

But after coming to CMU, she still had to face the misconception that to be Christian means to also be homophobic.

"I definitely did feel a little bit of fear towards coming back into a church, not just because of my history with it, but my fear of admitting to people that I believe in God," Scarnecchia said.

"There's such an association that it can be hard. A good chunk of people who come to Wesley are also people who have negative experiences through the Church."

She said it's been healing to be at Wesley, though. Scarnecchia goes to a couple groups within the church, including Queer Christian Connection.

"It's been awesome and really, really saved me," she said. But she added that because Wesley is the outlier as an inclusive church in Mount Pleasant, that can be scary.

"Some people look at 'open invitation' and see a threat to the comfort they've found in (exclusion)," Scarnecchia said. "I'm thankful that no one's come in and done anything... especially in Mount Pleasant."

This is something Hudson-Stone is aware of.

"We often take in 'spiritual refugees,'" she said. "The broader reality is that more churches are not safe places for

everyone ... making those safe places known is hard. While it is a lonely experience, we wouldn't trade anything for it."

Ebay Merlin is the volunteer coordinator at the Mount Pleasant Pride Center. They said the tone of conversation around religion is mixed when it comes up at the MPPC.

"There are definitely people who have religious trauma if they grew up in a church that was (unwelcoming) and left the church later," Merlin said. "That's obviously like a pretty big deal because church and religion in general can be pretty harsh to the LGBTQ+ community, but then there are people who have found (a) church that is really accepting, they're able to keep their faith going that way."

"So, it's really, really mixed, depending on people's experiences."

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'It doesn't define you'

For student Tarry Palmer, vision impairment is no obstacle to higher education

By Renae King
News reporter

Sporting a mobility cane, 50-year-old junior Tarry Palmer makes his way across Central Michigan University's campus, a moment he said he never would have imagined five years ago.

Palmer was born in Detroit, where he lived for six months before his family moved to California. He spent the next 19 years living and attending school there.

He said he had planned on enrolling in college after he graduated high school in 1991; however, his aspirations were abruptly diverted two months later with the passing of his father, changing his life forever.

"He was a single father raising my sister and I," he said. "So, instead of going to college right after high school, I had to start working two jobs, you know, moving from place to place and even being homeless for a bit."

Seeking a fresh start, Palmer had gotten in contact with his mother and moved to Canada.

Adapting to a new life

During his time there, he said he struggled with adapting to his new life and dealt with many mental health challenges.

On Aug. 28, 1996, at 22 years old, Palmer overdosed on drugs. After waking up from an 18-hour coma, he realized he had completely lost his vision.

"Over the next month or so, I started getting a little bit of vision back to where I could see shadows, and then it got to where I could start seeing images and people's faces a little bit more," he said. "After about a year, it's pretty much stayed."

He said after the incident, he could no longer see things in his peripheral.

Palmer describes his current vision as though looking through a pair of foggy binoculars.



Tarry Palmer poses with his dog Chewie, Sunday, March 24, in Mount Pleasant.

He said he has since learned to adapt to his vision; however, it had taken him a while to adjust.

"When you lose one of your senses, especially your vision, you have to learn to do everything all over again," he said. "Learning to eat, knocking over your drink at the dinner table was common at first, and even learning to walk again without peripheral vision."

Palmer said he still struggles with navigating certain things placed on lower and higher levels, such as stairs, tree branches and cracks in the pavement.

"Things that everybody normally sees without even thinking about it, it has to be something that I'm consciously trying to navigate around," he said.

In 2020 Palmer hit a turning point. With the pandemic, he left his job at a telecommunications company and moved to Taylor, Michigan, to live with his sister.

There, he attended online classes at Southern New Hampshire Uni-

versity; however, he said the online format just wasn't for him. He decided to apply to CMU. Within a few weeks he was accepted and moved to Mount Pleasant.

Palmer said he wanted to attend CMU for its museum studies program, which he said no other university in the state had. The price of tuition had also enticed him to choose CMU over other universities.

However, he said his main determining factor was accessibility within the community.

Accessibility and advocacy

Before he moved, Palmer said he thought he could rely on ridesharing companies such as Uber to help him get to classes from his off-campus house, but was surprised to find that wasn't the case.

"I rely heavily on public transportation, so before I ended up making the move, I did look into the city transportation that was

available," he said.

Instead, he's had to rely solely on public transportation, which includes I-Ride, Isabella County's busing transit agency. However, he said I-Ride hasn't always been reliable due to its staffing shortages.

Rick Collins, the executive director of I-Ride, said the company has been short-staffed since the pandemic.

"When COVID hit, we had an extreme decrease in need for services," he said. "So, we ended up losing probably about 18% of our workforce at that time."

Before the pandemic, Collins said they had over 80 drivers; now it's down to about 60. Collins said the company hasn't been able to recover, due to the current labor market.

While Collins said the shortage hasn't impacted their scheduled routes, it has impacted requested rides outside of the routes -- the service Palmer said he relies on to get to and from classes and to

navigate Mount Pleasant.

"I've been stranded downtown a couple of times for a couple of hours just because they didn't have any availability," Palmer said. "There's a lot of school programs as well that I'd love to do or go to, but, unfortunately, I'm unable to because of the unreliability."

Palmer said he's also had to miss a couple of classes due to the unavailability of drivers.

Because of this, Palmer said he's made the decision to transfer to North Carolina State in the fall, where he said public transportation is more reliable.

Despite these difficulties, Palmer said he hasn't had many other issues with accommodations and accessibility on campus.

While he said he doesn't utilize the student disability services on campus due to his own stubbornness, he hasn't had people deny him accommodations.

According to a 2022 Student Climate Survey Report done by CMU, 51.3% of the respondents said they had previously utilized the student disability services. About 65% of the respondents said they were satisfied with the office's services; however, 21% of students said that the campus did not meet their physical accessibility needs.

While Palmer said he didn't have many complaints when it came to campus accessibility, he said he's struggled with the electric scooters around campus; it's hard for him to judge how fast they're moving. Another issue he's had is with students walking around campus on their phone instead of paying attention to their surroundings.

Despite his decision to transfer, Palmer said he's glad for his opportunity to attend college and urges others like him to do the same.

"Believe in yourself," he said. "It (a disability) doesn't define you. If nothing else, it makes you stronger, makes you work harder. Don't use excuses, just go and do it."

Nico Mendoza | Visuals editor



Look Who's GRADUATING!

**Congratulations,
Class of 2024**



DONOVAN MARCUS ANDREWS



Donovan,

We are so proud of you and the man you have become. We can't wait to see Everything you will do in the future.

Your Proud Family,

Dad, Mom, Dorian and Tamryn

CONNOR BEAUDOIN



Connor: From the very beginning we knew you'd be a Chip! We are so proud of you and your bright future. Love, Dad, Mom, Maddy, Brooke & Piper

BAILEY BADGERO



Bailey,

We are so proud of all you have accomplished. We wish you the best and hope you enjoy every day of your journey ahead.

Love, Mom, Dad, Sara, and Bob

PAYTON JAMES KEENAN BERO



Payton- Congratulations on reaching the finish line after 16 years of hard work! We are all very proud of you and look forward to your life's next great adventure. Love, Mom, Dad, Erin, Mimi, Papa, Grandma, Uncle Bobby, Aunt Kim and Aunt Bonnie

EMILY BREDIN



Emily,

You did it! We are so proud of you! You've worked so hard to reach this day. We know wonderful & exciting things are yet to come for you.

Lots of love, Mom, Anna & Grandma XOXO

**Congratulations,
Class of 2024**



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ZIPPORAH ABARCA



Class of
2024



MORGAN LEE AVERY



Class of
2024



Zipporah Isabel,
It has been one of the greatest pleasures in my life nurturing and watching your growth. You never cease to amaze me with your brilliance, tenacity, depth, compassion, and versatility. You have accomplished so much at this young age. I know that you will continue to soar to great, new heights. I love you and like you just as much. Congratulations, Poe! 🍀
Mama

Morgan -
Congratulations on your graduation! We love you so much and are very proud of you! May the force be with you—always!
Love Mom, Russell, Elijah, Sammy and Truffle

AVA ELIZABETH DORRANCE BREWER



Congratulations, Ava on all your CMU accomplishments!
You really "Put Your Stamp On It".
"We Do"-love you and are so proud!
Mom, Dad, and Shelby
Fire Up Chips!



Class of
2024

ALLISON CARDWELL



Class of
2024



Congratulations Allison!
We couldn't be more proud of you! "Hears" to three more years down in Cincinnati to get your Doctorate of Audiology.
We love you so much!
Dad, Mom, John & Will

NATALIE SUZANNE BRANT



Class of
2024

Natalie-

From our fearless little girl to the beautiful young woman who now challenges the world - we are so proud of you and all your accomplishments!

We love you!

Mom and Dad



MADDISON CARLOCK



Congratulations, Maddison!

We are so proud of you and the woman you have become! May all dreams come true! Remember with God by your side all things are possible!

Love Mom and Dad

DUNCAN EMRYS CHRISTIANSEN



"Such a long, long time to be gone and a short time to be there."

We can't wait to see what your future holds.

Love, Mom and Dad

KANE IAN DRISCOLL



Congratulations, Kane!

We are so very proud of you and everything you do!

Love, Mom, Dad, Jade, and Ian

AUSTIN JEFFREY FREEMAN



Austin,

We are so proud of you. Congratulations on graduating! We are excited to see what your future holds. Bigger things are to come!

We love you!
Mom, Dad & Madison

CARLOS DAVID GARCIA JR.



Congratulations son!

Watching you grow up and achieve so much has been such an honor. I am proud of the man you have become and the joy you bring into this world.

I couldn't be happier to see you follow your dreams and do what you love.

Love,
Mom

**Congratulations,
Class of 2024**



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BLAKE CHARLES CODY



Class of
2024



Congratulations Blake!!

We are so proud of the kind, driven, young man you have become. Time has flown by and your next chapter awaits. Make your mark on the world, live life to the fullest, keep that positive attitude & compassion and good things will come your way! We love you!

Love, Mom, Dad and Austin

DEONNA EVON DAVIS



Class of
2024



To God be the Glory:

Deonna, we are so proud of you for achieving your doctoral degree. You kept the faith in God and achieved your goals to help others. We pray that Jesus will bless your future endeavors. You did it!!!! Proverbs 3:5,6. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not to your own understanding, acknowledge him in all your ways and he will direct your path".

We love you

BB, Mom, Delona, Dior, Husband- David Sons -Dustin and little bundle of Joy Dax
Rest of your family sends their love.



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2024

MEGANA CHIRUMAMILLA

Megana,
Congratulations on this momentous occasion!
Graduation is the product of the work you have
put in these past four years, and we couldn't be
more proud of you.

Love,
Mom, Dad, and Pravallika



LILLIAN GRACE DIUBLE

Lilly,
Your determination to succeed has been evident since you were born. We are proud of all you've accomplished and are excited to see what's next. Congratulations on your graduation!
Love, Mom, Dad, Abby and the rest of your fan club



Class of 2024

MICHAEL TODD FRANCE

Michael,

It seems like yesterday we were dropping you off at Herrig Hall. Your time at CMU has flown by!

We are so proud of everything you accomplished!

We love you,
Mom, Dad and Erica



Class of 2024

LUISA LILLIANA ESPINOZA

Congratulations Lily,

We couldn't be prouder of the talented, intelligent and driven woman you've become. The years of hard work and sacrifice have brought you to where you are today!!

This is only the beginning!!!

Love, Mom and Dad



Class of 2024

EMILY LUCILLE KOCHAN



CONGRATULATIONS!!!!

We are so very proud of you, and we can't wait to see what your future holds.

Keep following your dream. Central Michigan graduating class of 2024. You are such a beautiful and smart young lady.

Keep being you!! We love you so very much.

Love and blessings; Mom, Dad, Abby and Toby

MITCHELL JOSEPH McCRONE



Congratulations Mitch!!!

We are extremely proud of the compassionate, intelligent, and driven man you've become. It has been an incredible joy to watch you grow and succeed at CMU and in all aspects of your life.

Continue to strive for your dreams and desires that God places within you. We love you so much. Fire up forever!

Love,
Mom, Dad, Taylor, and Alex

MORGAN D. McLEOD



We are so proud of your hard work and accomplishments!

You will continue to find success in whatever direction you choose to go!

We love you!
Mom, Dad and Shane

MARISSA JENAVEE NEVEAU



We are extremely proud of you and wish you all the best as you move forward. Keep pushing boundaries and continue to inspire those around you.

Love,
Mom, Dad,
Desiree, Grandma

EMMA LAUREN OBERMILLER



Congratulations Emma!

We are so proud of you and all of the hard work you did to earn this degree! So excited to see what you do in the future!

Love always,
Mom, Paul, and Grace

ALAINA ROSE PATALON



Alaina,

Congratulations on your graduation from CMU. We are so very proud of you and can't wait to see what the future holds for you.

We love you,
Mom, Dad and Alexa



Class of
2024

ZOE K. HUGHES

Zoe,

We are so incredibly proud of you and all you have accomplished.

Your future possibilities are limitless, and we just know you are going to take the world by storm.

Congratulations on your graduation!

Love,
Dad, Mom, Emma & Brady



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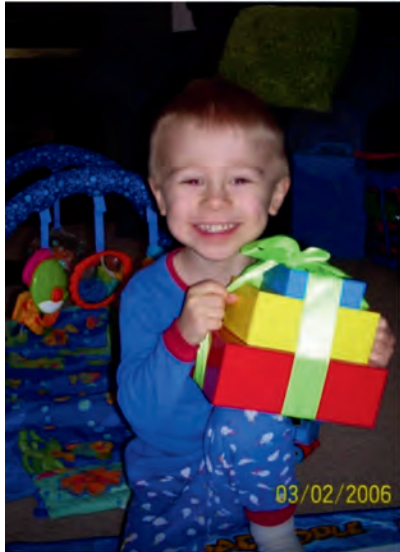
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AARON KLINE

CENTRAL
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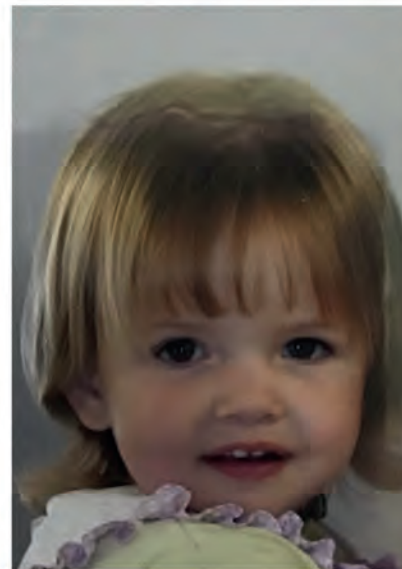


Aaron,
We are so extremely proud of you. Your amazing work ethic will lead you far.
Congratulations on all that you have accomplished.
Love, Mom, Dad and Lauren

BAILLEY MARIE KLUISZA

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Bailley,
The school years have flown by and you have accomplished so much!!!
There is no stopping you now! Fire up!!
Love,
Mom, Dad and Allexis.

NINA ZABORNEY KLINE

CENTRAL
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Nina,

From the strong, independent little girl to the strong, independent young woman, we are so proud of you and all that you have accomplished.

Always stay true to who you are. We love you very much, Lil Nin!

Love, Mama Ann and Mama Mary



JESSICA VUCINAJ



Jessica,

We are so proud of you,
great job and continued
success.

Love always and forever,
Mom, Dad, Christopher,
Heather, Jacob, Jason
and Leo

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KYLE ZACHARIAS



Kyle-

May this next chapter
bring you as much
happiness and success
that Central brought you!

We are so proud of you,

Dad, Mom & Mia

ALEXIS BRIANNA KIRK



**Class of
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Congratulations on your Master's degree!!

We are very proud of you and all you have accomplished! Can't wait to see
the great things the future holds!!

Love Mom, Daddy, and Damin



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RACHEL MAXINE LAPPANO

YOU DID IT!

Whenever you find yourself doubting how far you can go, just remember how far you have come.

Remember everything you have faced, all the battles you have won, and all the fears you have overcome.

Congratulations, Rachel!
We are so proud of you and excited for your future!!

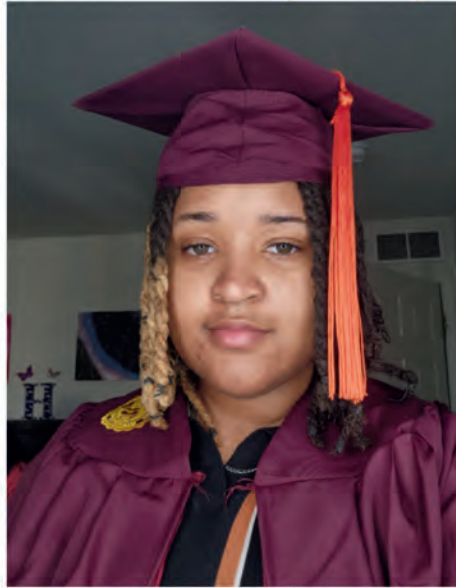
Love you,
Dad, Mom, Elizabeth and David



KIERA SHYRICE LUKE

CENTRAL
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2024



Kiera,
We are so proud of the beautiful young lady you have become. Great job on all your achievements and accomplishments and may you have many more. Congratulations we love you!!

ANNA (ACE) MCCLELLAND

CENTRAL
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Ace, 2024 CMU May Graduate, Bachelor of Science Degree, Major: Biology. We are very proud of you! You are coming close to completing your journey. Love,
Mom, Dad, and Pip

AUGUST JAMES MEYERS

CENTRAL
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Congratulations, Aug!

We can't wait to see where your next adventures take you; good luck next year with your Master's

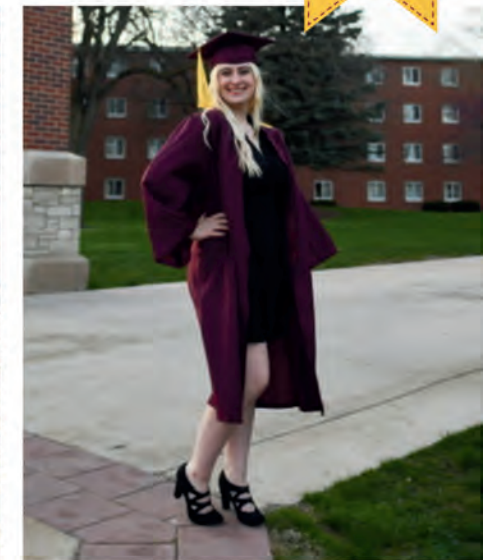
Love, Mom, Dad, Sam & Skye



ABBY NAGY

CENTRAL
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Class of
2024



Congratulations Abby!
We are so incredibly proud of all of your accomplishments so far. It's been amazing watching you live out your dream. Keep dancing!
We love you,
Dad, Mom and Ayla

HAILEY RYAN



Class of
2024



Hailey,

We are beyond proud of you! You have grown from a beautiful little princess, to the amazing, intelligent woman you are now. You bring us so much joy,

We love you,
Mama, Big Papa, Brandon,
Kyle and Addison



NADIA SIMONS



Class of
2024



Great job, kiddo!
Way to overachieve at CMU!
We have always been proud of you, and we're so very happy with your success.
Love, The Parentals



HANNAH WENKEL



Class of
2024



Hannah,

Congratulations on your graduation from CMU and academic achievements. We are incredibly proud of you, everything you've accomplished, and the person you've become. Continue to shine!

Love, Mom and Rick



WILLIAM LEE WERNER



Class of
2024



Dear Will,
You're not just any graduate; you're our pride, joy, and hope for a better world. Work hard, be kind, believe in yourself, embrace opportunities, stay curious, chase passion, celebrate the small wins, and remember to call your mom. May your journey ahead be filled with love, laughter, and success. With all our love, Mom and Dad



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KARA REAVES



Kara,

We've watched you grow and achieve so much.

You are a wonderful daughter and mother and we know you have a bright future.

Congratulations on your graduation!

Your graduation is a reflection of your dedication and hard work.

We are so proud of you!

Love, Mom and Dad



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'How we respond as an institution'

As semester wraps up, work on the university's nondiscrimination policies continues

By Zipporah Abarca
Editor-in-chief

As the spring semester wraps up, students, staff and faculty have been juggling the chaos that ensues with finals, end-of-the-semester events, job hunts, summer programs and most recently, racial discrimination that did not violate the university's policy.

The week of April 15, *Central Michigan Life* reported on the circulation of a video involving Central Michigan University students on identifiable CMU property using racial slurs. The same racial slurs were used by a staff member at a safe space listening session the next day.

Protests and a student petition spread throughout the week, and made themselves known at a meeting of the university Board of Trustees on April 18.

At the meeting, four students voiced their concerns, wanting to see actions being taken, while also commending the board on working quickly to do so. Chair Todd Regis presented an action plan on behalf of the trustees that included the 5-year Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and Belonging (DEIJJB) Strategic Plan and mandated DEI training starting in fall 2024 for all CMU members.

What's in CMU's current policy?

CMU's nondiscrimination policy falls under the Office of Civil Rights and Institutional Equity (OCRIE) instead of the University's general policies, Shawna Patterson-Stephens, the Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Belonging, said.

The policy is officially referred to as Non-Discrimination Opportunity and Affirmative Action Protocol, or the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Protocol on CMU's website.

The protocol is considered an

administrative policy that also aligns with the State of Michigan's Equal Employment Opportunity Plan that outlines OCRIE's guidelines for taking affirmative action when it comes to discriminatory violations, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

As of Sept. 22, 2016, the CMU Board of Trustees adopted a resolution that stated, "Central Michigan University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution. It encourages diversity and provides equal opportunity in education, employment, all of its programs and the use of its facilities. It is committed to protecting the constitutional and statutory civil rights of persons connected with the university.

"Unlawful acts of discrimination or harassment by members of the campus community are prohibited."

The effective date of the resolution was Jan. 23, 2017, according to the policy.

OCRIE's policy defined unlawful discrimination and harassment by the statutes and regulations of the United States and the State of Michigan as discrimination or harassment in employment, education, housing, public accommodations, public services and telecommunications.

Additional university standards said the protocol is intended to protect members of the community, but not regulate the content of speech, therefore not prohibiting anything protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

In the case of recent offenses, the racial slurs used by CMU members were not directed toward an individual.

According to two points in the Additional University Standards, the discrimination policy inferred that the discriminatory statements made by a member of the university community are in vio-



Soli Gordon | Staff photographer

Central Michigan junior Imani Ellsworth gives the march participants directions before the peaceful protest on Saturday, April 20, on the Bovee UC lawn. Before they left the lawn Ellsworth taught the participants chants to say while they march.

lation if they are directed toward another individual.

Although statements were not directly made at anyone in particular with the recent racial discriminatory offenses, the policy also recognized that any "unwelcome conduct or communication by a University Community member in that individual's role" is a violation, due to the effect of creating an intimidating environment to the education, employment, housing or participation in university activities.

The policy further reads: "The university recognizes that a particular expression as perceived by some members of the university community, standing alone, is not a legally sufficient basis to establish a violation."

An honor code

Patterson-Stephens said administrators are looking to "bolster up" this policy with a

potential honor code for staff, faculty and students to abide by in instances when discriminatory behaviors have been exhibited but do not violate the policy and yet are harmful, nevertheless.

President Robert Davies wrote in an email on April 17: "We know that change to policies, processes and procedures does not happen as quickly and as visibly as we would like; and we know there are additional opportunities for CMU to improve and much more work to be done."

Davies offered his assurance in the same email that the work being done will continue.

"We will never stop looking for ways to make our community more inclusive, supportive and empowering," he wrote.

Amanda Garrison is an associate professor of sociology on campus. At the April 17 protest, she said the institution does not need to wait for things to happen

in order for changes to be made.

"I think it's kind of a cop out to say that process takes a while when racism has been happening for 400 ... years," Garrison said.

Currently, CMU does not have an honor code or supplement to OCRIE's nondiscriminatory protocol for these instances.

Imani Ellsworth, one of the four students who spoke at the April 18 Board of Trustees meeting, said she wishes an honor code would have been developed earlier, but it is better now than never.

"However, that's not to say that as time goes on that it doesn't need to be reconstructed or readjusted," she said.

It should also be ensured that students are involved in that conversation since it is a reflection of students on campus, Ellsworth continued.

Aaron Foote is an associate

PROTOCOL

CONTINUED FROM 29

Aaron Foote is an associate professor in the school of politics, justice, society and public service. He said he is the only tenure-track professor in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences who is nontenured, which means he is not protected when it comes to university-wide cuts to staffing.

In response to the potential honor code, Foote described it as “a bandage” to a gaping wound and “a distraction” from institutionalized change.

“I also would challenge the legality of set agreements,” he said. “I’m not sure that ... will hold up.”

The best way to challenge discrimination issues is to educate and teach students on these systems so they can change them or get rid of them, Foote said.

“Universities are a system of white supremacy, period,” Foote said. “They always have been. And so, I am not in support of the University structured in the way that it is.

“I’m in support of knowledge and education and teaching and transforming students, but I’m not in support of the structure of the university. I think that does nothing for Black and Brown people.”

Patterson-Stephens said there are questions about having educationally focused conversations, considering the different investment levels of people on campus.

“I want to be able to meet them in the middle to figure out how we can help them along in their learning, while holding those that know better and don’t do better accountable,” Patterson-Stephens said. “Because I don’t want to lump everybody in that bucket.”

The potential honor code would be more educationally focused, but would have the same weight and maybe an even broader impact than a conduct policy alone, she said.

“Don’t we want a community that is embedded in care, concern or respect?” Patterson-Stephens

said. “And how do you develop a streamlined approach to creating expectations around that and then holding people accountable to those expectations knowing that it’s not like a punitive policy?”

Additionally, the nondiscrimination policy stated that the president of the university is directed to spread awareness on practices and procedures to realize the nondiscriminatory policy, which should also include the identification of the office where people are encouraged to report discriminatory cases for investigation and resolutions.

In Davies’ first email following the video of CMU students, he wrote that OCRIE and the Office of Student Conduct were investigating the matter. Additionally, towards the end of the email, he listed resources for students.

OCRIE’s nondiscriminatory protocol is not mentioned.

‘Why are you just now paying attention?’

The recent discrimination case on campus is not the first that has happened.

One of the most publicized was in 1993, when CMU’s then-basketball coach Keith Dambrot was fired for using racial slurs directed at the team. In 2020, another incident hit the media after CMU professor Tim Boudreau was caught quoting racial slurs to his class, and audio surfaced as recorded by a student.

Foote started working at CMU in August 2023. He said he was aware of the racial discriminatory issues at CMU before he came, but the truth is that these incidents happened at every institution he has been at.

“If you were to be a Black professor trying to pick ... some unicorn institution that exists that there are no instances of discrimination, you will be unemployed,” Foote said.

In response to some students, staff and faculty that have asked why an honor code is just now

being talked about. Patterson-Stephens said the question should not be “why now?”

“This (is a) conversation we have been having this whole time,” she said. “I wish people would actually engage more, because there are a lot of conversations that are occurring simultaneously around some of the needs that we have that are evident across our campus.

“Why are you just now paying attention?” Patterson-Stephens continued, turning the question back on the community.

She explained that communities across campus have been identifying and pointing out gaps for all three years she’s been at CMU

Some of the more recent conversations about DEI on campus or discrimination are because of change in leadership, Patterson-Stephens said. There are new ideas circulating the institution with information gathered at attended conferences and new people who fulfill leadership as others retire.

“But I wouldn’t say that we’re just now doing it, like there’s not just a consideration for (these policies) right now,” Patterson-Stephens said. “There are a lot of different councils and committees actively working across campus to try and wrangle in some of these concerns. Because we’ve been aware.”

Patterson-Stephens reflected on the recent events and said she appreciates the people who are paying more attention than usual.

“And some people are then asking themselves, ‘Oh, how am I contributing to this?’ Because they have the privilege to check out if they choose to,” she said. “I want those folks to remain engaged.

“And that’s why I’m saying when we think about, the Honor Code ... don’t we want more than what the baseline has to offer within our society? Don’t we want more for ourselves and our

experiences?”

The nature of it is, all institutions have these issues as a result of reflecting the society we live in, but that is no excuse, Foote said.

“The real thing that we should focus on is how we respond as an institution to these problems,” he said. “And what I have learned is that Central has repeatedly responded in ways that do not create systemic change within the institution to progress things on the basis of racial inequality at the university.”

Patterson-Stephens referred to the recent incidents as an experiment for people to also be asking the question: How do you use this community to create something better than the baseline that society has to offer?

In response to the students, staff and faculty that called for termination or expulsion of the CMU staff member and students, respectively, who used racial slurs, Patterson-Stephens said every situation is different.

“The thing that I’m combating frequently is (that) people (are) scared to engage because they’re afraid to make a mistake,” she said. “And where does that leave me and us as a community, if people are completely disengaged, because they’re scared they’re going to be canceled?”

Maybe 20 years ago, Patterson-Stephens said she would have hopped on the bandwagon for those individuals to be “canceled.”

“But I don’t know how that attends to the real issue,” she said. “And then it just leaves people feeling more isolated and probably inflames problems instead.”

Patterson-Stephens said she struggles with these situational instances. She believes there are times when someone needs to be removed from the community, but there are other times when we need to be cultivating peoples’ experiences so they are learning from it.

“And you cannot do that if you remove everybody,” she said.

Patterson-Stephens would like to see more dialogue around a model regarding the prevention of a community or an individual being further harmed by an incident, issue or behavior, while also trying to make sure it doesn’t happen anymore.

Students taking action

Morgan Grantling is a sophomore at CMU with a major in human resource management. This year marks her first on campus as a transfer student.

After hearing about the video that surfaced and the staff member participating in the use of racial slurs, Grantling said she was really shocked with what happened, as well as the impacts.

She said consequences only started to happen once students began protesting.

Ku’Juana Quinn is a senior at CMU pursuing a double major in political science and sociology with a focus in criminal social justice. When the racial discrimination incident happened, Quinn said she was among the students who arranged the three protests that followed that week.

She named a few Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) that were involved in those efforts, as well such as the Organization of Black Leaders (OBL), the Coalition of Black Empowerment (COBE) and the Student Advocates for Prison Reform and the Incarcerated (SAPRI). She said the Black community on campus has come together alongside the multicultural council to make those protests happen.

Ellsworth was also a part of these efforts, as she juggles a triple major and double minor in her third year at CMU.

Preparing for graduation herself, Quinn said these advocacy efforts have been a lot to bear.

“I feel like as a person of color, just as a Black woman in general, I’m unfortunately used to the heavy load,” she said. “It is the first time I’ve experienced any-

thing directly on this campus to this magnitude because I wasn't here when the last racial justice incident happened on the campus in terms of whiteboards."

Ellsworth agreed it was a very tiring week. Although the organizers are students, Ellsworth said, they are young adults getting ready to enter the real world.

"If we don't make people listen to us now, then they never will," she said.

With the way the university has handled more recent events, Quinn said this incident has seemed to have been handled passively, almost as though it was brushed off by administration.

"Whether that's intentional or not, and I feel like we're taking a stand (because we want) more direct change, more direct impact (and to address issues) more direct," she said.

Ellsworth said the protests and student representation in the board meeting applied pressure to those in higher power.

As Quinn spoke, she mentioned a group of students who were attending the Board of Trustees meeting on April 18 to have their voices be heard, one of which was Ellsworth.

"Even as students we have a voice and were able to make change," she said. "It definitely got things done in a fast amount of time."

Quinn recognized that it is important for students to take a stand, "but it never should have to get to this point," she said.

As for previous racial incidents on campus, Ellsworth said that with this case in particular, students have stood more unified.

"It's different when you have to go alone and present this information," she said. "It was an entire community and allies that we all stood together on this one firm thing. I think it was honestly hard to ignore."

With finals week rapidly following the racial discrimination incidents and the student-planned protests, Garrison said she has a concern that "this beautiful energy for change (would) be eclipsed by finals week."

"Students deserve to have



Soli Gordon | Staff photographer

Participants march and hold signs advocating for change in a peaceful protest on Saturday, April 20, outside Warriner Hall.

parties, they deserve to have celebrations, they deserve to feel as though they can celebrate anywhere here and, obviously, what we're seeing is many of our students do not feel that they can even celebrate those things," Garrison said. "But the pressures of those finalities are going to impact everyone."

She said when students graduate, their institutional knowledge leaves with them. Therefore, as summer carries on and fades into the fall semester, incoming and non-graduated students will be on to the next thing.

Ellsworth said the topic of institutional knowledge being lost is a conversation being had within her own community — "how do we keep the momentum going?"

In an email statement, Garrison acknowledged that there is still work being done over the summer with student groups, faculty and staff training, and with administrative initiatives being implemented.

"It is no one's fault these changes ebb and flow, but that is where the institution should pick up," she wrote in an email. "It should not be on students to continue to call for change and see little or nothing in response to them."

Ellsworth said as people move on to different paths, there is a

need for training and informing people to never let anyone forget.

"Just letting people know that the things you do and the words you say have an impact," she said.

Ellsworth recommended required DEI training for staff, faculty and students.

"I think a big part of it is also who's teaching it," she said. "You can't have a white individual speaking on matters of color or incidences, because you can't teach someone what you yourself don't know."

Foote disagreed. He said that diversity training does not change people's perspectives, it makes them better social actors.

"It makes them better at pretending and knowing the knowledge to navigate issues of race, but it doesn't help them or change their perspectives on race, racial inequality and racism," he said. "And so, we need to do that through evidence. Through programming, through majors, through new faculty, through course offerings."

Foote said the university claims to focus on liberal arts, but some of the conversations within the Academic Senate about the general education model would get rid of classes that deal with issues of race.

"They actually have an effi-

ciency model that's designed to get people to graduate quickly," Foote said. "Well, what does that actually turn students into? Does it transform them? Does it help them learn how to critically think? Does it help them to deal with issues of race? No."

Diversity trainings are a distraction from actual structural change at CMU, Foote said.

"They're designed to get you and other students to feel like the university is doing something without them actually putting their money where their mouth is," he said.

The associate professor said he would like to see change that will actually impact his students, since they will have to deal with racism in their everyday lives.

"But if I can give them the tools to mobilize and advocate for themselves, and to make this society a better place, that's what I'm focused on," he said. "But also, they need the tools, the mental health support and the resources to be here. And that's the place I want to get to, and I think that's the place students want to get to as well."

How accessible are the university policies to students?

Recently, there have been discussions within the president's cabinet about how to make information more available to students, such as university policies and resources, Patterson-Stephens said.

"Trying to make it (university policies) as available and accessible as possible, is a continued struggle that we have with any other information we have," Patterson-Stephens said. "We're always trying to find different ways to reach students."

Patterson-Stephens referred to the communication challenge between administrators and students being an "age-old issue" that has been around for at least three or four decades.

Staff and students don't sufficiently know what's going on around campus, Ellsworth said — and that's with most things,

including the racial incident that occurred the week of April 15.

"You may get a million emails and only open about 100 of them," she said.

Along with engaging, effective communication to students, Patterson-Stephens said it is also important to recognize the context needs to be as intuitive for administrators as the students.

"We're always trying to find different ways to make sure that students still feel like these things are legible," she said.

As far as it goes for students, staff and faculty to also be seeking out the information, Ellsworth said there is a certain accountability as an individual to know and look for those resources.

"However, I do think that the resources are limited in how information is being brought out to everyone," she said. "So, I think it just goes back to transparency of how can you change something if you don't know anything?"

When Patterson-Stephens thinks about her experience as a student with the various forms of communication, she takes that into consideration with the current generation of students and what platforms they use.

"This is why we ask for feedback or participation for input from students' perspectives on committees, even in some of the special counsels in search processes," she said. "We're asking for engagement because (students) know better than we do what it feels like to be a student right now. In ways that I'm trying to understand but I will never understand fully because it's not my experience."

Overall, Ellsworth said if anyone feels alone, they are not. There are many people on campus — including herself, trusted staff and faculty — who are willing to help others speak up if they feel uncomfortable in doing so.

"Although we are a small community," she said, "we are mighty."

Of scholars and soldiers

For student veterans, education and service are deeply intertwined

By Renae King
News reporter

For many, college is a moment of significant change – a transition from one chapter of life to the next. But for veteran students, this transition carries unique challenges.

Michael Ritchings, 51, is a student veteran at Central Michigan University. However, his path to higher education was not easy.

With a desire to pursue a higher education, he saw the military as his ticket to a brighter future.

“I came from a poor family,” he said. “I didn’t earn any scholarships or anything like that coming out of school, so I had to go through the military to get that

GI Bill (educational assistance for servicemembers and veterans.)”

Ritchings spent four years in the Marine Corps starting in 1990, then another four years in inactive reserve time, until 1998. During his 11 years in the military, he served around the globe in locations such as California, Germany, Kuwait and Afghanistan.

Due to the housing market crash in 2008, he decided to re-enlist with the goal of retiring from the military and paving the way for his higher education.

However, in 2015, he ended up medically discharged.

Undeterred, Ritchings embarked on a new chapter, working for the Saginaw Veteran Medical Center. Through this, he bought

his military time into federal employment and finally retired after 20 years of service.

He enrolled as a student at CMU the following fall semester. He’s now working towards a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with a focus on studio work.

Many other veterans at CMU pursued a career in the military to afford college too, such as Wyatt Heppner.

As a high school senior weighing his options for the future, Heppner said he was drawn to the military by the promise of financial support for college.

In the summer of 2017, he joined the Michigan Army National Guard, working in radio communications.

While still in the service, Heppner



Michael Ritchings

Heppner started attending classes at CMU during the spring 2019 semester; he currently studies integrative public relations.

During his time at CMU, he found himself thrust into critical roles.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, he was activated to assist in converting the TCF Center, now called Huntington Place, in Detroit into a makeshift hospital.

Heppner said he didn’t miss

any classes during this time; however, he wasn’t as lucky in 2021 when he was activated once again in response to the storming of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, in an attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election results.

While working a night shift at Soaring Eagle Casino, Heppner received a sudden call to report to Fort Custer. Within hours, he found himself deployed to Washington, D.C., as part of a massive National Guard presence following the Capitol riot.

What was initially intended to be a two-week assignment extended to three months, during which he stood guard outside the Capitol building.

Because of his time away, Heppner was forced to drop his classes. He said CMU hasn’t given him any issues because of this, and was able to receive a refund.

Despite the disruptions caused by his deployments, Heppner said CMU has been understanding and helpful in assisting him through these situations.

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Resources and connections

One resource Heppner and Ritchings said has been extremely useful to them has been CMU's Veterans' Resource Center.

According to the Veterans' Resource Center's page on CMU's website, it's been ranked as a gold level, veteran-friendly school for the past eight years by the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency.

Shane Taylor, the assistant director of the Veterans' Resource Center, said its main function is to "provide assistance with any and all VA education benefits."

He said the office also helps students with tuition assistance and anything else to help them become successful on campus.

Duane Kleinhardt, the director of the resource center, said the veteran students who are most successful are the ones who feel welcomed.

"The other part of our job is to provide services and opportunities for those military-affiliated students to feel welcome on

campus and not feel like they are out of place," he said.

Transitioning from life in the military to university can often-times be challenging for veteran students. But according to a 2022 Student Climate Survey Report done by CMU, about 68% of military members and veterans said they felt welcome on campus.

"Their life experience is different," Kleinhardt said. "They've often been responsible for much more than your typical freshman, and that changes people quickly."

Since coming to campus, Ritchings said he's experienced this.

"Veterans are a different culture, a different group, a different demographic," he said. "When you go to your boot camp, it changes you, it messes with your head and makes you more susceptible to fight-or-flight responses. So being able to have somebody that might understand that and talk about that is very helpful."

Some 32.2% said that the Veterans Resource Center had somewhat or very much helped

them in their adjustment, while 32.1% of the respondents in the Student Climate Survey Report said the office hasn't facilitated their adjustment to civilian life at all.

Heppner said the best way for student veterans to adapt to life on campus is to get in contact and connect with others.

"Try to be somewhat involved in something on campus because it helps keep your focus with stuff that's going on, on campus," Heppner said. "Because there's no one that's going to be there telling you that you need to do something."

Ritchings urged other veterans to also pursue a higher education and to take advantage of the resources that CMU has to offer; however, he said that they must take the initiative.

"It's just a matter of doing it," he said. "Just come in, go into the school that you want to go to and talk to them. There's somebody that will talk to you, but they won't take those first steps, so just do it."



Courtesy photo|| Wyatt Heppner

Central Michigan University student Wyatt Heppner poses outside of the U.S. Capitol Building in this 2021 photo. Heppner, a member of the Michigan Army National Guard, was deployed to Washington, D.C., following the Jan. 6, 2021, attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

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Strategic plan breakdown

By Zipporah Abarca
Editor in chief

Central Michigan University has never had a strategic plan dedicated to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and Belonging. Just recently, that changed.

Starting in 2023 until 2028, the DEIJB strategic plan will be implemented by campus leaders, including the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (OIDEI) as well as the Division of Student Affairs.

OIDEI has been charged with leading all nine goals consisting of 59 tasks out of the 82 in total, meaning OIDEI is leading 71% of the strategic plan's tasks, and 100% of the goals.

The Division of Student Affairs is leading 42% of the DEIJB strategic plan's tasks, taking on 35 of them. Student Affairs is involved in seven of the goals, therefore taking on 77% of the work.

Shawna Patterson-Stephens, the vice president for Inclusive Excellence and Belonging, said it is prime time for learning how to embed some of the strategic goals into daily practice, so it does not become an "extra thing" to do in staff's workday, especially the turnover.

"I think faculty and staff need to be supported in doing that," she said.

Matt Johnson is a professor in higher education and the program director of the Master's in Higher Education and Administration program. *Johnson is also husband to Erica Johnson, the interim assistant vice president of Student Affairs.*

This did not impact Central Michigan Life's reporting in any way.

He said the university is closer to achieving concrete DEI efforts than "I think we've ever been in my 12 years here."

"I think the problem is ... we're doing all this in the seventh year of continuous cuts at this institu-

tion," he said. "So, we have fewer people, fewer hands trying to do the work,"

Aaron Foote is an associate professor in the School of Politics, Justice, Society and Public Service. He said, "put your money where your mouth is," when addressing how Student Affairs leads majority of the goals in the strategic plan while being underfunded and understaffed.

He recalled a conversation he had with someone from Student Affairs who had said the university kept giving them awards but they do not support them financially.

"You can't dump all these ambitious goals on three people (MASS staff)," he said.

The success of the strategic plan is relying on offices that are "severely understaffed and underfunded," Johnson said. However, CMU as a whole could say the same thing.

"There is not an office on this campus right now that I think I could point to that would say, 'Hey, I think this office is sufficiently staffed,'" Johnson said.

Junior Imani Ellsworth said with Student Affairs leading the plan it is just adding to the workload those offices already have.

She said it puts the division back into a cycle of having to lead this plan to make campus more inclusive, while also listening to students voicing their concerns.

"It kind of just puts us back in that cycle of 'we can't help you right now'," she said. "So then incidents like this happen again."

Foote said that most offices that cater to Black and Brown students are typically overworked, lacking resources, funding and support.

"Central wants to be the leader," he said. "Let's be the leader. Let's support those offices, let's recruit Black and Brown students. Let's build the apparatus for that to happen."

Foote referred to this issue as a crossroads. The institution and

students get to decide what the future is going to look like.

"I believe we can do it right if we want to do those things," he said. "But this is a question of do we want to do it? Or do we want to superficially address this, let it go away, and can get back to the business as usual."

"... It's happening (struggle with moving forward with DEI plan) in pockets in different places, in different ways across campus, and a lot of that is you know, related again, to turnover, loss of institutional history and energy," Patterson-Stephens said.

Additionally, with new hires or staff and faculty that have been on campus for years, it can be easy to rely on the ways they have been used to, rather than trying to move forward as one, Patterson-Stephens said.

"The one thing that I've been asking people across campus think about is adding reflexivity or reflection into their day-to-day work so some of that doesn't get lost in the shuffle and then become an add-on later," she said.

There are more people talking about DEI on campus and subcommittees in UDEIC that are looking at how to measure the progress of the strategic plan's goals as well as publicize this progress to media and the community, Johnson said.

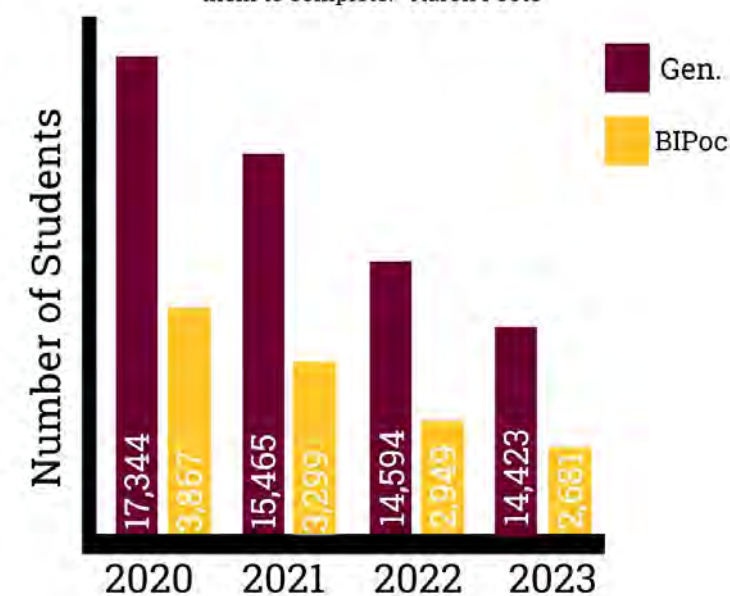
Johnson serves on one of the nine subcommittees within University Diversity Equity and Inclusion Council that consists of about 50 members providing representation from across campus. Each subcommittee is charged with different goals from the strategic plan.

Nikita Murry, the director of Diversity Education, also serves on the council and worked alongside Patterson-Stephens in creating the strategic plan.

She said she works on three subcommittees in the council to implement the strategic plan.

The focus within those committees is on communicating what's

"If you have differing needs, (among students of color) you have to understand students on the granular level...you're (the university) bringing in students without having the support necessary for them to complete." -Aaron Foote



CMLife Illustration | Zoey Lawrence

happening to the rest of the university, diversifying staff and professional development, as well as ensuring those representing CMU understand the mission of DEIJB.

"The DEI Council has individuals across all roles," she said. "You have senior officers, you have OPs (Other Personnel services), you have all people who are part of it. When you think about giving voice to a campus around something as important as equity, inclusion and belonging, you can't do that effectively without engaging all voices."

UDEIC has been charged with leading 100% of the goals in the strategic plan, and 20% of the tasks.

Johnson commended Patterson-Stephens' leadership with the strategic plan and the people that are helping in these efforts.

Patterson-Stephens said herself, staff and faculty understand what needs to get done within

the year, but it is about how they are taking the time to ensure it is being done the way the strategic plan was created to do for the institution. It "takes intentionality," she said.

They're "doing good work," but OIDEI and Student Affairs are understaffed and do not have the budget to do "any of this or most of the stuff that's in there (strategic plan)," Johnson said.

Johnson referred to his observation as "tempered optimism."

"I do hear a lot of 'yeah, this is great, but there's no money for this stuff,'" he said. "How is there going to be (enough) to really make a difference?"

Eventually money will be found for some initiatives, he said.

One of CMU's biggest issues and goals within the strategic plan is the graduation gap among white students and Latino, Black and Indigenous students, he said.

"Even if we in five years, close that (graduation) gap by half and

didn't do one other thing in the strategic plan that would be a win," he said. "We can do more, we should be doing more... but you know, that would be a win."

Johnson said there is reason for optimism since there is a lot to like about the strategic plan, but there are also lots of critiques.

"But you know, if we accomplished some of that stuff in there and made significant progress on it, especially amidst these constrained times financially, I think we'd be doing all right," he said.

Based on his own observations, Johnson said there a lot of people who view the strategic plan as an effort OIDEI and Student Affairs will be taking on by itself for the benefit of the campus and community.

"If you view the success of this strategic plan as what they're (Student Affairs and OIDEI) going to be able to do, you might as well just pack it up because they're not going to be able to do 5% of what's in that strategic plan," Johnson said.

"It's a campus wide event. That's why on UDEIC, there's 50 some people on the committee," he said.

A strategic push

Patterson-Stephens mentioned the DELJB strategic plan on the topic of policies students, staff and faculty need to be aware of. She said it is a very detailed plan that should act as a "cheat sheet" for engaging in DEI each year until it is fulfilled in 2028.

"I think all of the efforts that are happening in Student Affairs to best impact co-curricular lived experiences here are crucial to student success in knowing what's going on within the capacity of Student Affairs is really important," she said.

The hope is that students are understanding what is happening with the strategic plan and efforts are being made to engage with it, Patterson-Stephens said.

"I hope that interactivity is happening, but I'm not sure it is," she said.

Murry also encouraged students to read the strategic plan and hopes students will work

to understand what diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging means.

"If people are willing to do the work and they have a different opinion or a different worldview perspective of what it means to have an equitable, inclusive society where everybody belongs ... and you're still against that, there's nothing I can do about that," Murry said. "But I don't know how you could do the work and not understand how silly it is to say that you're against equity, inclusion and belonging."

When it comes to the DEI Strategic Plan, Murry said this plan gives opportunities for the university to take action and hold themselves accountable.

In an email from President Robert Davies on April 17 in response to the racial slur incidents, he urged students, staff and faculty to review the DELJB strategic plan to get an idea of the current work that is being done to strengthen DEI on campus.

At the Diversity Symposium on April 24, Davies partook in a 'Fireside Chat,' which was mediated by CMU student Fatima Khan.

On the topic of the next university president and how that transition will impact the success of the strategic plan, Davies said in his transitional periods of becoming president, he has always worked with previous presidents to get their advice.

"I am making myself available to the next president, whomever it is, for that process to go forward in that area," Davies said.

As for advice he has with leaders within institutions implementing DELJB, Davies said to be brave, visible and vocal.

"... Always be learning, always be engaging, always be listening, especially in higher education institutions. This is the place where these discussions need to occur, this is the place for these ideas to be planted and seeded, watered and grown," he said.

In the process of creating the strategic plan, Davies said CMU changed its mission statement: CMU is defined by the success of our students and alumni and

the collective communities that surround us that we serve.

Nine goals, five years

Goal 1: Enhance opportunities for holistic, intersectional development and socialization among BIPOC students.

Goal 2: Decrease persistence divides existing between white students and BIPOC students.

Goal 3: Reduce curricular/co-curricular challenges contributing to gaps in BIPOC student graduation rates.

Goal 4: Attract, recruit and hire diverse faculty and staff.

Goal 5: Retain diverse faculty and staff.

Goal 6: Advance CMU's commitment as an equitable and inclusive community.

Goal 7: Embed focus on DELJB within CMU's mission, core strategies and operations.

Goal 8: Cultivate an inclusive and psychologically safe educational environment.

Goal 9: Cultivate an inclusive, welcoming community off-campus.

CMU students, staff and faculty thoughts

Foote said when he was made aware of the enrollment issue on campus, he did not realize how drastic the decline was specifically for Black and Brown students.

"Part of me is concerned about that," he said. "And part of me is a little bit relieved because I would hate for other Black and Brown students to be here and to experience what the students ... here are experiencing and also experiencing the lack of support, programming and initiatives and finances to create inclusive spaces here."

Foote described the enrollment issue as a "double edge sword." CMU needs the apparatus and institutional support to keep recruiting and retaining Black and Brown students, but also recruit Black and Brown faculty to address the needs of students.

As for the strategic plan, he said he had not heard of it or reviewed it.

However, he said the institute can be alienating or hostile when it comes to retaining students of color.

"Where do people get their hair done?" he said. "Where do you get a hair cut? What amenities are there for Black and Brown students?"

"I also think part of it is lumping BIPOC students together. That's why I don't use those terms. Because all those students have different needs. And so, if you have differing needs, you have to understand students on the granular level."

Ellsworth said that as long as the school continues to listen to students and continues to strive for inclusivity and working with students without their own agenda, but focusing on student wants — that will go far.

"Students aren't gonna stay anywhere where they don't feel welcome or like where they belong," she said. "... As long as students are happy, their graduation (rates) will increase ..."

Ellsworth had not heard of the strategic plan until the recent racial slur incident.

"... While I do think it's a great start, and I'm glad that the university is now taking accountability and presenting a structure of what's to come ... I'm a person of action," she said. "So it's great to see on paper ... but I want to see it actually in action ... making sure that they are holding everyone accountable."

Foote said there are not enough academic advisors, counselors or students support services personnel to support incoming and current students.

"So, you're bringing in students without having the support necessary for them to complete and then it's no surprise that they're not completing," he said.

When talking about the recent strategic plan, he said it doesn't change his perspective.

"A strategic plan is a plan," he said. "It's not an act and it's not funded."

When reading through some of the strategic plan, Ellsworth said herself and her peers have noticed the vagueness behind the goals.

"When you make it so vague, it kind of allows anything to fly," she said.

"I'm beyond just lip service to these issues without real dollars to be spent," Foote said.

Plans have the potential to fall through since they are just plans, Foote said. Therefore, he would like to see commitment and that the goals within the strategic plan are achieved.

Aside from making the plan more specific, Ellsworth said students should also be involved in the planning process when it comes to structuring those goals.

When looking over the strategic plan goals, Johnson said he had noticed that two populations were not mentioned concretely. The LGBTQ community was only ever referred to as an affinity group throughout the plan.

"That's really problematic," he said.

Additionally, there is a large rural student population at CMU, however, there is no mention of that demographic, Johnson said. First generation students are brought up once in the strategic plan briefly in the tasks of the third goal as "first generation support."

"There's a lot of significant oversights in that strategic plan for diversity in my estimation," Johnson said.

"... I don't think it's a positive thing that these other marginalized and minoritized groups aren't even seen in it."

Johnson recognized the challenges of including the names of every single marginalized and minoritized group and said it is probably not feasible. However, there are a lot of big groups of marginalized individuals who are under threats to their safety and well being who are not named in the plan, he said.

There are some good ideas in the strategic plan, Foote said as he briefly looked it over. He said the people that worked on the plan are confined by structures.

"If we want real change, we have to enable folks working on these issues to have the power to enact change," he said.

News reporter Courtney Boyd contributed to this story.



Life through our lens

At Central Michigan University, heritage months are honor the cultures and heritages of students, staff and faculty. *Central Michigan Life* photographers were on-hand this semester to commemorate many of the institution's inclusive efforts.



Jo Kenoshmeg | Staff photographer

Central Michigan junior Myairra Jefferson points at the audience while performing in the OBU 24th Annual Show Friday, Feb. 23, in Plachta Auditorium.



Jo Kenoshmeg | Staff photographer

Women dancers wait to get judged after performing at the Annual CMU “Celebrating Life” Pow Wow, Sunday, March 24, in McGuirk Arena.



Auset Pope | Staff photographer

CMU senior Regina Araujo-Pedroza, president of Ballet Folklórico de la Luz, performs at the 2024 Intercultural Unity Festival, Saturday, March 16, in the Biosciences Building.



Ella Miller | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University President Bob Davies speaks with a child on stage during the introduction of Indian Night on Saturday, April 20 in Finch Fieldhouse. Davies was invited to help light the Diya before the event began, which is a tradition in Indian culture symbolizing knowledge and hope.

Commanding Attention

CMU dance team captains write their names in history

By Sydney Neal
Sports reporter

On a campus that booms with athletics, Central Michigan University's dance team falls through the cracks. The team fights for the opportunity to be seen as more.

Alyssa Melnik and Alaina Patalon have spent the past year as co-captains, steering the CMU dance team to success on the national stage. With two consecutive national titles under their belts, the captains leave behind notes of resilience, dedication and hopes for the team as they prepare to graduate this May.

Melnik's journey in dance began at the age of 4, while Patalon's started at the age of 2. Their paths to becoming captains, however, took distinct turns.

For Melnik, the absence of a high school dance team didn't deter her dreams; instead, she drew inspiration from collegiate dance programs.

"I would always watch the college dance team nationals because I ... thought the group dances were really cool," Melnik said. "So, when I applied to Central, I kind of just checked out the social media of the dance team, and I thought it would be fun to be a part of."

Patalon, on the other hand, found her passion for dance revived after finding out about CMU's dance team. Coming to campus during her freshman year in 2020, she took the opportunity to try out virtually.

"I honestly had no intention of trying out for dancing here at all," Patalon said. "I did dance team my senior year of high school ... then COVID happened, and I got everything taken from me. I think having it taken away from me so fast made me realize that I wasn't ready to be done."

Their freshman year, clouded by the restrictions brought by COVID-19, presented unprecedented challenges. They were not allowed to dance at football and basketball games, and the traditional avenues for team bonding and interaction were eliminated.

As they entered their sophomore year with fewer restrictions, Melnik and Patalon set their sights on the ultimate prize: a national championship. When the opportunity finally arrived their junior year, they took every opportunity to experience their first nationals. The trip came straight from their own funds.

"So, at that time it was new for all of us," Melnik said. "We were

hoping to do well but we weren't really expecting anything major to come from it. ... We were just happy to be there."

For both girls, it was important to defend their standing title after the adversities faced in previous years. The team spent holiday breaks and the offseason preparing for the big stage.

The sacrifices were immense — two-a-day practices spanning six to eight hours — but the rewards were even greater, and bonds formed through sweat and tears emerged as the backbone of their success.

"Practice ... kills us a little bit," Melnik said. "It's a lot but it's worth it. It's also a really good time for our team to bond just because it's so physically and emotionally draining. ... It is huge for shaping our team and defining the season."

Despite their remarkable achievements, recognition as a varsity sport is still not present. In a sports landscape dominated by traditional varsity programs, the CMU Dance Team often finds itself pushed to the sidelines, its accomplishments overshadowed by more mainstream athletics.

ments overshadowed by more mainstream athletics.

"It's frustrating," Patalon said. "We don't get a whole lot of recognition, but ... when we do, it means a lot. At the same time, we know that it could be more. When it comes to other sports and athletics, I mean we're lucky if we get a post or even just a repost on an Instagram story."

But the team refuses to be deterred; they see their platform not just as dancers, but as advocates for female equality in sports.

As Melnik and

Patalon prepare to pass the torch to future generations, their legacy transcends mere championships; it's a testament to the resilience, passion and unwavering spirit that defines the CMU Dance Team.

"I feel like in general it's sad to see women in sports just pushed to the side and unseen as secondary athletes," Melnik said. "(We hope) that our team knows how capable this program is of continuing this growth and success, and just that they continue to push and advocate for themselves and know their worth."

As they reflect on their journey, both have ambitions beyond collegiate dance. With their college careers ending this May, they have promising new opportunities for growth and fulfillment; yet their commitment to the CMU Dance Team remains unwavering as the team has forever impacted their lives.

"We have a ton of new faces, and I mean it can be a little discouraging because it's a new team and you don't know how everybody's going to work with each other," Patalon said. "But we clearly made it work, we brought home two titles."

"So yeah, they got it."



Alaina Patalon, left, and Alyssa Melnik pose for a portrait Wednesday, May 1.



Marie Underwood | Staff photographer

CMU dance captains Alaina Patalon and Alyssa Melnik show off their national championship rings on Wednesday, May 1, in Moore Hall. The team placed first in Division One Pom and Division One Jazz at The College Classic on April 13.

Leading by example

For Tangela Cheatham, the mission to support student-athletes doesn't end at the buzzer

By Sydney Neal
Sports reporter

Tangela Cheatham, the deputy athletic director for administration, has long been driven by a passion for helping student-athletes thrive beyond the game. At Central Michigan University, she serves on the department's leadership team and oversees the student-athletes and institutional support services.

With a background in student-athlete development, she helps them navigate campus life.

"I came here because of the opportunity to do that from an administrative standpoint," Cheatham said.

Cheatham was interested in

leading student-athletes and finding ways to move the industry forward from a higher education standpoint.

The Michigan native graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's of business administration and arts, so the chance to return back to her home state was no question. After being recruited from the United States Military Academy at West Point, Cheatham brought with her knowledge and determination to make a difference here.

After undergrad, she spent her time at the University of Oklahoma completing her masters in higher education. This prompted her love for the growth of student-athlete experience.

Starting as a life skills academic coordinator, she quickly realized her calling was more about having a direct impact on not just the athletes, but the coaches and staff.

"I am working directly with our athletics director," Cheatham said. "I am working with people who are in decision-making roles; meeting with our president to help make things happen for our student-athletes, for our coaches and staff."

Throughout her journey, Cheatham has encountered challenges and moments of doubt, but she never let them drive her away.

"There are these perceptions that go into how you may navigate different spaces," Cheatham said. "I do think I've experienced



Tangela Cheatham

a number of things that go into how I navigate different conversations."

Identifying as a Black woman, she understands the weight of her voice on a campus that is predominately white. She highlighted the importance of maintaining confidence and pride in growing and being resourceful.

According to CMU's 2022 Employee Climate Survey Report, only 79 out of 2,245 staff, faculty and administrators are Black or

African-American. Further, when asked the why certain staff or faculty members decided to come to Central, only 10 responses were related to diversity on campus.

When looking at the opportunities that not only Cheatham receives on campus but also students who attend and are considering Central Michigan, she recognizes the efforts that the institution has put in over the years through the events hosted year-round.

One of the first people Cheatham remembers meeting after arriving on campus was Shawna Patterson-Stephens, the vice president of Inclusive Excellence and Belonging at CMU. Together, they worked to implement initiatives that would impact the campus community.

"I get on my meetings when I can to work on the diversity symposium," Cheatham said. "We were even trying to find ways to expand those programs to (athletics) ... to get more people involved."

She continued to admire President Bob Davies' commitment to

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diversity, equity and inclusion.

"I think there's always work to do, that's just life," Cheatham said. "But I do think that the institution strives to be supportive, strives to be inclusive and ... to progress."

Cheatham emphasized the importance of mentorship and support networks for minority students on campus. To her, "having certain support systems can

help not only a student's career but also their time on campus and ... in life.

"I wouldn't be anywhere or have anything that I have without the support of people in general," Cheatham said. "I think you need champions; you also need the support of people who hold the same identities."

With a vision of creating an

inclusive space where voices are heard, Cheatham has remained dedicated to her commitment to fostering a sense of community and belonging.

"We have an obligation to help move forward DEI efforts on this campus," Cheatham said. "We go out and spread the name of Central Michigan University every time we compete ... and maybe

that will lead to more students from different places ... providing even more diversity to the institution."

In Cheatham's eyes, the journey to completing the diversity, equity and inclusion standards is far from over. There are still strides to be made and voices to be heard. But, she was confident that the path forward would be one of

progress and inclusivity.

"Making sure to create spaces and support those spaces while making sure voices are welcomed when they speak up," Cheatham said. "Listen to those voices and implement initiatives and continue to push those forward."

"Those are the main things Central can do to see people come and retain the people that do come."

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